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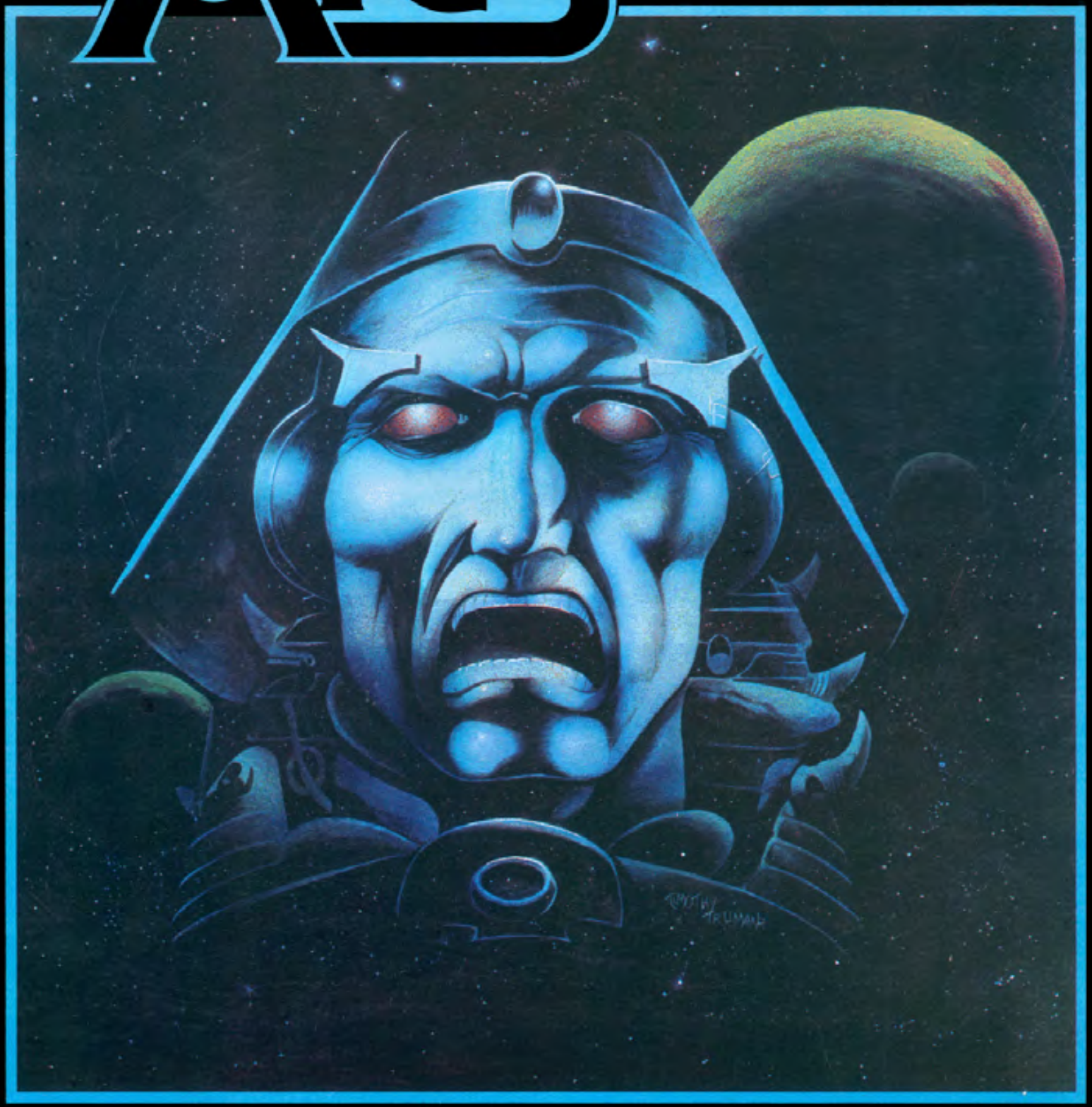

Meet the Sh'k'tlp in — **FIRST CONTACTS**

SPI

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THE SCIENCE FICTION GAMING MAGAZINE

ARES

SPECIAL EDITION Nr. 1
SUMMER 1983

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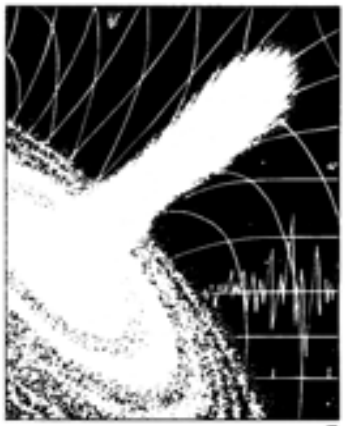

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ON THE COVER

The man staring at you from this magazine's cover is Vlad Pinsky, a daring Human who has become quite at home on the alien world of Sh'k'tlp — described in the First Contacts supplement to the *Universe*™ game included in this issue.

If Vlad looks a bit strange, it's probably because he's been practicing the Sh'k'tlp psionic powers, and been surrounded by a race of beings who can shape-change at at will. Vlad was painted by Tim Truman.

ARES™ Magazine Special Edition Nr. 1, Summer 1983
THE SCIENCE FICTION GAMING MAGAZINE

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Ares log

Special Edition Nr. 1, Summer 1983

Welcome to the first Special Edition of *Ares* Magazine! The Special Editions will maintain the same format of the regular game issues, but will concentrate on different aspects of the magazine's formula. Sometimes we'll delve deeper into science fact, other times we'll explore myriads of game variants. This Special Edition is loaded with the long-promised First Contacts supplement to the *Universe*™ role-playing game.

Although the supplement may be especially interesting to role-playing gamers, it stands on its own as an imaginative piece of science-fiction as well; the human race's first encounter with an alien race, and the subsequent developments are depicted with clear-eyed realism.

The First Contacts supplement describes the Sh'k'tlp (pronounced Shi-k-i-tlip), a carbon-based life form that breathes oxygen. They are not warm-blooded, which doesn't bother them much since the average temperature on their planet is 100 degrees Farenheit. The Sh'k'tlp have distinct male and female sexes and they incubate their eggs in pouches — a duty shared by both sexes, though the females usually have a closer attachment to their eggs.

The Sh'k'tlp's physical, mental, and social behavior are examined in the supplement, as well as their history and technological development, samples of their artifacts, and their method of space travel.

Our two fiction pieces this issue are from opposite ends of the literary realm of fantasy. "Nitimandrey and the Cabinetmaker's Vision" by Jessica Amanda Salmonson, is a classic tale replete with myth, dignity, and a surprise ending. "The Oaken Sword" by Ian McDowell is a slightly off-color raucous romp through medieval times. The story presents a character from King Arthur's court who doesn't quite share the same sensibilities as his peers.

L. Sprague de Camp, noted sf and fantasy author, takes a look at the adventures of Conan the Barbarian, and the hero's creator, Robert Howard, in an exclusive piece for *Ares* Magazine. Author de Camp synopsizes the many escapades of Conan and includes the titles of the stories for further reading.

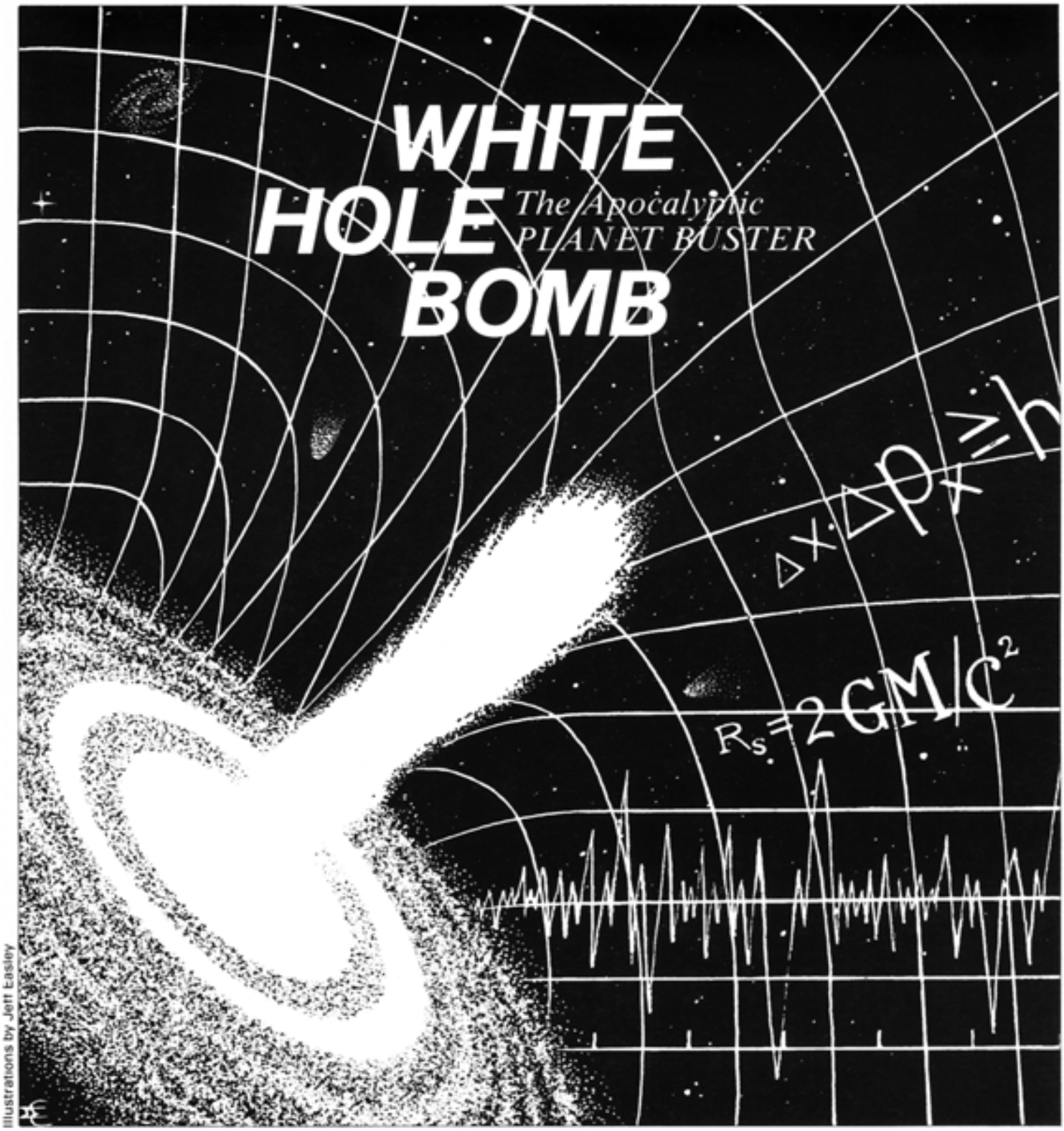
Our science fact piece this issue is "White Hole Bomb" by Curtis L. Johnson. The author, an accomplished science writer, describes the possibility of creating the ultimate weapon — taking the rear end of a black hole, called a "white hole" and making a bomb out of it. It's the biggest planet-buster of them all.

READER SERVICES

Since TSR bought *Ares*, we've been trying to revitalize the magazine. We're introducing, starting in *Ares* 16, two new sections to service our readers:

1. We want to get a letters column going. That means you get to sound off at us with complaints, suggestions, ideas for games, etc. We'll print any letter (with a reasonable content) that we think deserves to be read. We want the letters column to be a public forum — we won't shy away from ebarrassing matters, and we'll answer the letter, if it needs comment, in print. Address letters to the attention of the Letters Editor and the address given on the masthead at left.

2. We want to get gamers' classifieds going. Got a game to sell? Looking to buy a specific game? Looking for other gamers in your area? Got a convention you want to announce? Send us your notice and we'll print it for free! (That may just change a bit later...) Keep your notice down to 25 words, write it intelligibly, and be sure to include any necessary information. Address notices to the attention of the Notices Editor and the address given on the masthead at left.



Illustrations by Jeff Easley

by Curtis L. Johnson

One of the dangers of black holes is widely known: if you fall into them, you fall out of our universe. Less widely known is the danger of black holes *falling back into our universe*, an effect caused by marrying quantum mechanics and general relativity. When the last of the black holes returns to our universe, it will fall so fast that the blast will be at least several hundred times greater than the Earth's nuclear arsenal. Used as a weapon, it would devastate not a nation, not a continent, but an entire planet.

Black holes are the last stage of gravitational collapse, when matter attracts itself so strongly that it overcomes all other forces and pulls even light back down into it. Since nothing can travel faster than light, this matter has cut itself off from the rest of the universe and so becomes a black hole. (It's called a "frozen star" in Russian, since "black hole" is an obscenity.) Scientists know nothing of what goes on behind a black hole's surface — the *event horizon*. But scientists do know three things about black holes; these three things affect all aspects of our universe: mass, angular momentum, and electric charge.

A large star ends a short life as a super-

nova. The star literally blows apart, blasting its core inward. If the core has more than two and a half times the mass of our sun, it collapses into a black hole. Such a remnant seems to have been detected near Cygnus X-1 in 1971. Since then, astronomers may have detected a black hole five billion times the mass of the sun in galaxy M87.

By itself, the general relativity of black holes allows a bomb, like the one proposed in *Nature* magazine by William H. Press and Saul A. Teukolsky. The mechanism is derived from the innocent-sounding fact that if a beam passes near the hole's equator in the direction of spin, it gains power at the expense of the black hole's rotation. In the opposite direction, the beam of light would lose energy. Physicists dub this effect *superradiant scattering*. Since up to 29 percent of a black hole's total mass-energy might be tied up in its spin, a rotating black hole can provide considerable power and energy.

A spherical mirror would cast the light beam back again and again, gaining energy each time around, thereby making an excellent laser amplifier. Should the beam not be released within a few seconds, however, it would gain greater and greater power until it shattered the containing mirrors in a mighty and spectacular explosion.

How mighty and how soon? That would depend on: 1) wavelength and amplitude of the original beam; 2) mass, angular momentum, and charge of the black hole; 3) number and nature of the orbital paths; 4) reflectivity—which must be greater than 99.8 percent, and mechanical strength of the mirrors. The only theoretical limit is the black hole's original angular momentum.

In practice the mirrors would fail far before that limit. Since no mirror reflects perfectly, each orbit would heat the mirror until it rapidly melted. But even with perfect reflection, no known mirror can withstand the equivalent of a nuclear explosion. The black hole bomb is not a dud, but a firecracker compared to our present bombs.

A white hole bomb would be different. Its mechanism is derived from quantum mechanics, thermodynamics, and general relativity. Its how-and-why is unavoidably more complicated to explain, involving such concepts as the uncertainty principle, virtual particle pairs, and exciting level.

The Uncertain Horizon

A black hole becomes a white hole and explodes because of the nature of the unknown. To physically know something about an object, it must be measured, but scientists cannot measure something without affecting it at least a little. (A thermometer subtly warms or cools whatever temperature it is measuring.) The smaller the object measured, the more it is affected. The more we know where a small object is at the present time, the less we know where it was or where it will be. This limit to human knowledge is called the uncertainty principle.

Scientists are not the only observers. The universe "measures" itself each time its parts interact. Exploding dynamite measures its amount of nitroglycerine; evaporating water the amount of sunshine; etc. Within the error of these measurements, "forbidden" behavior can occur. The laws of the universe allow for a police force that cannot stop crimes ants commit, or a mother whose naughty child sneaks a cookie before dinner. No equation can be seen as "actually" or "totally" true if it does not incorporate this uncertainty.

This is no idle theorizing. The science of electronics uses the tunnel diode, wherein electrons cross an otherwise impassible barrier because there is a small, but real probability of them being found on the other side. Similarly, particles can "tunnel" across a black hole's event horizon, and the smaller the black hole, the easier the tunneling.

However, this way of looking at the white hole could be false, since we cannot even assume that particles remain the same on both sides of the event horizon. To assure the white hole bomb's possibility, we must stick with what we know about what we cannot know about what we can know — in other words, the uncertainty principle's effects in this universe.

Virtual particles are like real particles of matter and energy, except that they can exist only on the other side of the uncertainty limits. Each "actual," that is, observed particle constantly emits and then instantaneously reabsorbs a "cloud" of virtual particles. A roughly equivalent image is a drop of boiling water in outer space, a drop large enough for its gravity to recapture the condensing steam, again and again.

To assure the white hole bomb's possibility, we must stick with what we know about what we cannot know about what we can know.

What distinguishes between actual and virtual particles is whether or not their lifetimes are observable. Richard Feynman, who won the Nobel Prize for cofounding quantum electrodynamics, has pointed out that since we cannot track any particle forever, actual particles will become virtual particles once out of sight.

A virtual particle becomes an actual particle when the particle emitting it is annihilated, transformed, or knocked away by another particle. It has no choice then but to go on as an actual particle; because of mass-energy conservation, however, the energy of its being must be supplied from elsewhere.

Nor is this idle theorizing. Virtual particles lie at the conceptual heart of quantum electrodynamics: the physical theory experimentally verified to more decimal places than any other. Also, while virtual particles themselves cannot be directly measured, their effects can and have been. The changes in electron orbits from the random impinging of the electron's cloud is known as the Lamb shift and is quite analogous to the dance-bounce of a dust mote under air molecules.

Virtual particles can also spring into "being" out of empty space — so long as they come in yoked pairs, matter and antimatter. They are yoked together through electrical attraction, being oppositely charged. As science and science fiction fans know, matter and antimatter destroy each other on contact. Actual particles leave behind gamma rays, but virtual particle pairs literally annihilate each other, period. Their mass-energy flows back into the field from which the pair borrowed to "exist" in the first place. The larger the virtual particles, the faster the cycle must occur to keep covered up by the uncertainty principle.

Another quirk keeps matter and antimatter from being identical twins. When quantum electrodynamicists plot space vs. time for the matter-antimatter reaction of actual particles, the diagrams show matter and antimatter traveling oppositely in time. Time seems to be a distinction made by us, not by actual particles themselves and certainly not by virtual pairs.

"Well," you might ask, "virtual particles seem quite interesting and amusingly confusing, but what do they have to do with the white hole bomb, anyway?"

Everything. Because a black hole breaks up virtual pairs, it explodes back into the universe.

When the gravitational field is strongly stressed, and just outside the event horizon it is as stressed as it can possibly be, virtual pairs find it easy to borrow the energy for their existence. So near the event horizon, many will fall into the hole before they can annihilate each other. This happening makes little difference to our universe: the pair remains unobserved. But occasionally only one falls in and the other does not, the one that does not becomes an actual particle.

Where did this actual particle's energy come from? From inside the black hole. How? Remember that the virtual pair is matter-antimatter, and that the two forms travel oppositely in time. Stephen Hawking, the physicist who predicted this occurrence in 1974, explains in *Scientific American*: "Thus the antiparticle falling into a black hole can be regarded as a particle coming out of the black hole but traveling backward in time. When the particle reaches the point at

which the particle-antiparticle pair originally materialized, it is scattered by the gravitational field so that it travels forward in time." If a particle falls in instead, an antiparticle is emitted. In this bizarre way, *the black hole becomes a white hole — and is both at the same time!*

The hole becomes smaller. Smaller holes stress the gravitational field around them more than larger ones, and this stressing spawns more virtual pairs. As more and more virtual pairs break up, the hole shrinks faster, and more pairs form and break up, and so on to explosion.

The Timing Is All

If we assume that the hole has no charge or rotation, and nothing wanders into the hole, the timing of this explosion can be determined from the simple equation:

$$\text{Lifetime of black hole} \approx 10^{66}\text{years} \times M^3$$

where M is the hole's mass over the mass of the sun (10^{30} kilograms). If the sun were a hole, it would last 10^{66} years, short of forever only to the purist. Lack of mass cubes lack of years, however, and a hole decayed to a kilogram has only 10^{-18} of a second to live! That's hardly long enough for usage.

The rate of particle emission can be considered a "temperature" covering not only the infrared waves we feel as heat, but mass as well. (The two are equivalent through $E=mc^2$.) The temperature's rise is predicted by the equation:

$$\text{Temperature} = \frac{6\times10^{-8}\ ^\circ\text{Kelvin}}{M}$$

Kelvin is degrees centigrade above absolute zero, which is just under – 460° F. A sun-massed black hole will be only about a millionth of a degree Kelvin cold, but the kilogram white hole would sizzle at 3×10^{22}° K. A hot concept to handle.

Scientists cannot predict what will come out of a white hole. They can only say that it must be consistent with the mass, angular momentum, and charge of the black hole, as well as the laws of our universe governing form. Anything at anytime is remotely possible, including you or me or the next issue of this magazine. And it is exactly as possible as anything else of equal mass-energy. To say that a quantity of mass-energy could be anything, is to say it has total entropy, pure randomness, unchecked possibility, utter meaninglessness.

Oddly enough, this complete absence of order in the emissions gives scientists a sense of order. Humorously enough, this means a black hole is a perfect *black body*. A black body is an ideal thermodynamic object: the nature of its radiation depends only on its temperature, all other factors having been randomized. For any temperature there is a most probable frequency curve for its radiation, called a *thermal spectrum*. The higher the temperature, the more the curve looks like a straight line. The lower the temperature, though, the less possible types of radiation it can emit. For any temperature there will be a peak on this curve where more of a wavelength is radiated than at any other point on the curve. As the temperature rises and makes possible shorter wavelengths, this peak of maximum intensity shifts to shorter wavelengths and flattens. All wavelengths increase in intensity with temperature.

Although a set amount of mass-energy can have equally probable forms, that does not mean that those forms will happen exactly as each other. That happens only at an infinite temperature. Rather, it means that there will be ratios between the two, and that these ratios will be mass-energy equivalents of each other. For example, an atom of protium (the usual proton-electron form of hydrogen) would be emitted twice as often as an atom of deuterium (whose added neutron weighs as much as the proton and electron combined together).

Don Page of Caltech calculated that a hole with 10^{17} grams will radiate no mass particles to speak of, its spectrum being approximately 81.4% neutrinos, 16.7% photons, and 1.9% gravitons. (If neutrinos have mass after all, then their percentage will be lower.) A hole with 5×10^{14} grams will radiate a spectrum of 45% electrons and anti-electrons, 45% neutrinos, 9% photons, and 1% gravitons. A hole of extremely high temperature could even theoretically emit other, smaller black holes, but scientists consider this possibility unlikely.

White Hole Bomb

So, the hole empties itself, and then —

All hell breaks loose. Matter and antimatter meet and annihilate, leaving pure energy in the form of gamma rays. Unstable particles decay into other particles within nanoseconds and picoseconds; stable particles are torn apart by other particles. Charged particles are sent awhirl by each other's magnetic fields. Atoms are broken and blended, fused and fissioned into other elements, releasing still more energy. The hole ends its life in a ten million megaton explosion, hundreds of times greater than the world's nuclear arsenal. (If quarks are not the end-all of subatomic particles, then the explosion would be be up to one hundred thousand times more violent.) Every type of radiation and every radioactive isotope would be left behind, making the explosion an unimaginably "dirty" one.

William J. Kaufmann III, of UCLA and Caltech, estimates that the blast could literally dust the moon across the solar system. Such an awesome weapon would seem to be more at home in science fiction than in science fact. Yet the atomic bomb first made its appearance in science fiction, as did particle beams, radar, biological warfare, lasers, and most of the rest of the panoply of modern warfare.

Yet science fiction must be constrained by science. By testing whether it would be a useful weapon in a hypothetical context, we can safely assess whether the white hole bomb might become an actuality. If deliberately delivered to a military target, the white hole's death would bring total war, total destruction. Would it bring total victory, even in the realm of science fiction?

So, the hole empties itself, and then all hell breaks loose. Matter and antimatter meet and annihilate, leaving pure energy in the form of gamma rays.

Firepower alone does not a weapon make. Military strategists must also consider supply, reliability, storage, delivery, vulnerability, cost, and flexibility. A potential weapon which fares poorly in more than one or two of these criteria will probably prove more of a disadvantage than a decisive or real advantage.

Supply. If supernovae created holes, not only would the holes be too distant to procure and too large to manipulate, but they could not explode until the universe were a few hundred quintillion quintillion times older. Not only the enemy, but the Milky Way would die of old age before then.

Luckily the Big Bang which created the universe was more powerful than a supernova and may very well have created black holes of all sizes. If one of these primordial holes began with the mass of a mountain (about four billion kilograms), were electrically neutral, and had not rotated or trapped any mass-energy since its creation, it would explode about now.

Primordial holes could end inside a planet, nibbling away unseen like a termite. The mountain-massed hole, however, would be only about a proton across; with such a small mouth it would starve. The bark of its eventual explosion would be worse than its bite, but it would remain inaccessible.

However, Dr. Robert L. Forward, senior scientist at Hughes Research Laboratories, suggests that such holes might have lodged themselves in asteroids. Asteroids suspiciously warm or dense could be nudged aside and the hole recovered. If it were nearly neutral, electrons fired into it would enable its manipulation through magnetism, a force 10^{37} times stronger than gravity.

What are the chances that holes await us out there? Scientists only know that there are none nearby in the open that are within a century or two of explosion; astronomers

would have seen them otherwise. As for white holes far away, the cosmic gamma ray background sets an upper limit on how many are now exploding. With this estimate and a few almost arbitrary assumptions, the solar system could have, on the average, one primordial hole. However, an asteroid's rock would absorb everything but neutrinos — so difficult to detect they have been nicknamed "ghost" particles. The asteroid's surface would eventually radiate the heat kindling beneath, but only a handful of asteroids have had their temperature taken.

One last theoretical difficulty may bedevil those people who might be planning a white hole bomb. Since the universe was still very dense right after seeding primordial holes, much matter may have been squeezed into them — perhaps enough to keep all from exploding so far. Or the holes may have been too small to sop up much matter, and so they may have all evaporated by now. As their creation and sudden growth took place well within the first millionth of a second of time, the controversy is far from settled.

Thus a massive search may be totally wasted, or far worse, a search might enable an enemy to stumble across a hole much closer to explosion. The best strategy might be to simply keep an eye out when surveying the suspicious asteroids.

Could a white hole be made instead of mined? In principle, yes, but the process would involve a massive scaling-up of the inertial confinements scientists are now trying for fusion energy. One relatively straightforward method would be to simultaneously fire lasers from all sides at an asteroid machined into a perfect square. However, this would take nearly as much, if not more power as what would be released by the hole's explosion. Moreover, this power must be delivered before ablation and reflection destroy the lasers. *No mistake can be made.* A too-small white hole could carry away the entire project and leave no clue behind as to just what went wrong.

Still, only one is needed. Some time in the future a space prospector could end up very rich or very dead.

Reliability. There are no moving parts to wear out. While the timing and output of the hole's explosion are "only" probabilistic, according to quantum mechanics everything is probabilistic anyway. The hole's final decay involves enough particles to be more or less consistent, but with no other weapon would we need worry about "more or less."

Storage. The specific white hole's mass and spin dictate how long it will have to be stored. Increasing mass or spin delays the explosion. Magnetic braking could slow spin, but superradiant scattering would also supply power.

Having braked the hole to a halt, we can only wait while it blasts out harder and harder radiation. At about a trillion degrees it will radiate matter and antimatter for the million or so years the hole has left. Obviously, any white hole bomb in storage will be rough and get rougher on its containing magnets and anything else in the area.

As the white hole becomes ever more dangerous, it becomes increasingly harder to handle. Once it radiates matter, it sheds any charge as fast as possible. Charge could be maintained only by an extremely accurate electron gun; such a device would also temporarily stave off the explosion by adding mass. But only temporarily. The containing magnetic field and the hole's charge would curve electrons awry. The electrons would need increasing kinetic energy to push on through; their momentum would tend to displace the hole. The point of no return would come when the hole sheds its mass and charge faster than they could be restored.

A preemptive strike could cut electricity to the magnets and turn the hole into a "loose cannon" destroying everything in its path.

The bomb must be ready for use within a reasonable time, but not so short as to prevent repairs if something goes wrong. Some of the things that can go wrong are: enemy attack; malfunction of electron gun, magnets, electrical supply, or any of the measuring systems; breach of the container; miscalculations; and any factor overlooked by theory or construction.

Thrust and Parry

Deliverability. Though planners need not worry too much about accuracy with this least subtle of weapons, they would certainly want it used as far away from their backyard as possible.

However, the white hole will be hardest to move precisely when it is most useful militarily. Though much, if not most, of its mass will have radiated away, proportionately more of its charge will have also. Not that it would ever have been easy to shift around a proton-sized million or billion tons, but the loosening hold of the magnets and the need to traverse interplanetary or interstellar distances makes the task like trying to bowl without fingers.

On-time delivery to another system will be impossible if the hole is too far gone. As any SF fan knows, faster-than-light propulsion ceases to be reliable in the vicinity of a hole. And sublight speeds increase the time lag without easing problems of acceleration, deceleration and timing. Notably, the magnets would be hard put to retain their grip. Also, throughout the entire journey, the bomb would remain vulnerable to sabotage or countermeasures by an enemy.

The white hole bomb shares a weakness with the guided missile: once launched it cannot be recalled. Next to impossible to brake, the bomb will be nearest the target precisely when it is traveling the fastest. Contact can be prolonged up to an hour by proper aim. Though the bomb may not go off exactly when desired, the pre-explosion radiation might effectively eradicate the enemy population.

But the attacked civilization need not be defenseless.

Vulnerability. Invisible to the microscope, the white hole would be nonetheless more difficult to hide than to find. Gravity cannot be shielded, so the bomb's gravitational anomaly would be detectable by orbital changes, gravity waves, and through gravitometers (a device which is used to locate oil fields).

Nor could it be camouflaged. A white hole nearing detonation is *hot*, hotter than any star. Covering it will not cover it up: insulators would disintegrate, melt, or soon glow only at a slightly lower temperature. Only cooling fins, and good-sized ones at that, could dissipate the heat, but the fins themselves would be quite visible, as would the enormous generators for the magnets (whose strong field itself would be noticeable) and the heavy guard. Space, though vast, is clear and open.

A preemptive strike could cut electricity to the magnets and turn the hole into a "loose cannon" destroying everything in its path. Breaching of the temporary container would flood the storage base with intense radiation. Like any other objective, the bomb could be captured and held, forcing a battle that might ironically determine by itself the war's outcome.

The bomb's radiation and escort would herald the approach to a threatened planet, handing it time to deflect the bomb with its magnets or to ram the bomb's own magnets. Ramming the hole itself could not add enough mass to significantly delay the blast, but would impart some momentum. Nuclear blasts would indirectly deflect the hole by momentarily repelling particle formation on the explosion's side, but it is problematical how close the warhead could approach without melting, disintegrating, or being set off by the radiation. Fire can fight fire: Mirrors could deflect it by focusing radiation back upon it, while another large hole would simply swallow it up. Ironically, the hole would not be immune to the gravity of nearby objects. The bomb's escort must keep its distance from the radiation, whereas the defenders would be willing to accept higher doses and would be exposed a shorter time.

The Bottom Dollar

Cost. Since the bomb cannot be placed where it could possibly fall into the home

planet or star, transportation costs to and from home would be considerable. Delivery would be even more expensive, since the white hole and secondary systems would weigh in the neighborhood of a million tons. No government could ignore the accelerating expense of replacing equipment and personnel due to the bomb's radiation, nor the need to guard it as tightly as one's home planet — which would at least double the defense budget.

These are obvious costs. But using a white hole for a bomb would eliminate other uses for the white hole, such as a power plant run by direct capture of outgoing radiation, or by catalysis of fusion, as proposed by Nuckolls, Weaver, and Wood of the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory.

Flexibility. The white hole bomb is the only bomb which will always yield the same megatonnage, no matter what the circumstances, but scientists cannot know how many megatons until an actual blast occurs. If the quark theory is incomplete, then the bomb's user must make sure to be over three hundred times farther away.

The clock set by the universe on this time bomb can be turned back only a little, and that small amount is achieved only with great effort. Nor can the clock be pushed forward once the hole's spin has been braked. The chances are thus very good that the bomb could not go off within the lifetime of its engineers, and therefore could not be used for any intervening war. Contradictory possibilities might also occur: The white hole might not live to the target, and if it did, there might be no enemy left by the time it arrived there.

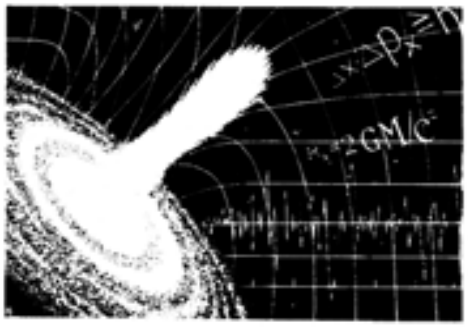
This inflexibility of timing means that the bomb could be captured before it goes off. Being unmanufacturable, it would be unique. No government could permit another to have it alone. Mass or temperature could blurt out the time left until the explosion, permitting raids free from fear of retaliation. All the opponent's forces might attack simultaneously, for the bomb would create an enemy with nothing left to lose. Since sole possession provokes attack without providing the means to repel or deter, the white hole bomb could lower its owner's security.

The white hole bomb would create an enemy with nothing left to lose.

Fallout

The white hole bomb would be hard to defend; it would be expensive and difficult to procure, maintain, and deliver; it could only be used at a certain time; it would be an ever-present and increasing danger to its keepers — even if any suitable white holes were found.

But might not the immense firepower tempt a future military to attempt its development anyway? Nearly every major weapon introduced within the past century and a half has been thought so horrific that war was unthinkable — the Gattling gun, high explosives, the airplane bomber, the atomic bomb — yet all have been used in war. Once quantum physics matures more as a science, why would the white hole bomb be any different than other weapons?



So far, the hydrogen bomb has not been used in warfare because of its immense destructiveness, and yet it continues to be made in quantity. However, there is a sign of hope: megatonnage of single warheads has leveled off between one hundred and two hundred megatons, even though a hydrogen bomb has no theoretical limit to megatonnage.

Indeed, firepower is the best argument against the white hole bomb's use. A nation could not use it against another nation on the same planet, since both would probably be destroyed. It is a common fear and somewhat of a misconception that World War III would blow Earth apart, but the white hole bomb would do just that.

Nor could this weapon be used on any other planet within the same stellar system. Upon dissolution of the parent planet, a moon would fly off on a tangent, and its new orbit might intersect that of the bomber's home planet.

The white hole bomb can only be used by one stellar system against another. The enemy star itself could be knocked out, either by direct disruption or by removing enough of its surface mass for the core's heat to disperse the rest. This employment may not be smart since it would affect any territory within tens of light years.

Even if the target were merely another system's planet, the radiation would jam radio-wave and solid-state devices for many years, no minor matter for a computerized society. And with its screening magnetic field and ozone layer in slow collapse, Earth does not need any more ionizing radiation from mega-conflicts in space.

The white hole bomb, though feasible in science, may be best relegated to the dominions of science-fiction — where such world-crunching concepts belong. ▲

THE ANTIMATTER BOMB

The white hole bomb may be too big to be militarily useful, but it is still not the biggest bomb imaginable.

All bombs work by the sudden transformation of mass into energy. This principle is most obvious with atom and hydrogen bombs, which accomplish this purpose by dividing or melding matter into forms that altogether have less mass than before; the difference becomes energy. Even a firecracker uses this same method, only less efficiently and with compounds instead of atoms. The white hole bomb uses this principle with the mass of the black hole and by the transformation of matter and antimatter by each other into energy.

Of all the means of transforming mass into energy, this meeting of matter and antimatter is the most efficient. Chemical means are the least efficient; fission (the atom bomb) can achieve a fraction of a percent, fusion (the hydrogen bomb) up to two percent, matter and antimatter — one hundred percent. Clearly, an antimatter bomb has the potential to be the most powerful bomb.

Though it could be graded down to a manageable size, it would be plagued with too many problems to serve a military purpose. Not least would be the problem of supply. There is no detectable antimatter occuring naturally within our solar system, nor does there seem to be any within the Milky Way galaxy (barring a stray white hole or two). Even the antimatter from an evaporating white hole could not be recovered, as it would be in immediate and annihilatory contact with matter.

Antimatter, however, has been manufactured by laboratories for decades. Within the last several years scientists have developed the storage ring. Antimatter particles are orbited by superconducting magnets in a vacuum, protecting them from matter. However, manufacturing antimatter takes at least as much energy as the antimatter will give back. The storage ring is a battery, not a source of new energy, and it would be much more economical to make another kind of ultimate bomb.

The antimatter bomb would be more difficult to store than the white hole bomb. While a white hole bomb's explosion lies in the future, the antimatter bomb could destroy its keeper at any second. Upkeep would require an uninterrupted and gargantuan outlay of energy for the magnets. Any variation in the magnetic field or breach of the container wall would bring catastrophe. Moreover, not even a perfect magnetic field could prevent collision scattering among the particles themselves. Construction of a storage ring the size needed would be easy to spot by satellite. Transportation would be totally impossible.

An antimatter bomb is a nightmare we will never see.

CONAN

A synopsis of the ultimate hero's adventures

the Barbarian

by L. Sprague de Camp

In the realms of adventure, fantasy, and imagination, few heroes can match the exploits of Conan the Barbarian. Created by Robert Ervin Howard in the early 1930s, Conan still grips our sense of bravado many years later — most recently in a feature-length film by Universal Studios.

L. Sprague de Camp, noted sf/fantasy writer, has compiled a synopsis of Conan's adventures for Ares™ *Magazine. De Camp is the author or coauthor of more than 95 books, and 400 articles and stories, many of which deal with the Conan myth. De Camp is also no stranger to adventure: He has been chased by a hippopotamus in Uganda, by sea lions in the Galapagos Islands, and has been bitten by a lizard in the jungles of Guatemala. He may well be the ultimate author to present the ultimate hero.*

- Editor

Illustration by Timothy Truman

TIMOTHY
TRUMAN
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In Robert Howard's Conan stories, before the earliest beginnings of recorded history ". . . shining kingdoms lay spread across the world like blue mantles beneath the stars — Nemedia, Ophir, Brythunia, Hyperborea, Zamora with its dark-haired women and towers of spider-haunted mystery, Zingara with its chivalry, Koth that bordered on the pastoral lands of Shem, Stygia with its shadow-guarded tombs, Hyrkania whose riders wore steel and silk and gold. . ."

Thus Howard's Hyborian Age, between the destruction of Atlantis and Lemuria and the oldest historical records. Memories of the Hyborian Age exist only as myths and legends. Howard assured his readers that this was a fictional construct, made up as background for stories, and not a serious theory of human prehistory.

In Howard's chronology, the Catastrophe — when "the oceans drank Atlantis and the gleaming cities" — took place about 18,000 B.C. The civilizations of Atlantis, Lemuria and the main or Thurian continent were blotted out; the survivors reverted to savagery.

In time these peoples built new civilizations. By 15,000 B.C. two powerful empires, rife with sinister sorceries, had arisen in the western part of the main continent: Acheron and its southerly neighbor Stygia. The northern barbarians, the Hyborians, overran the civilized lands and destroyed Acheron. On the ruins, the conquerors raised semi-barbarous kingdoms, which grew into mighty nations — Aquilonia, the strongest Hyborian kingdom, resembled medieval France; Zingara, medieval Spain; Sygia, pharaonic Egypt; Shem, a land of quarreling city-states, ancient Syria and Mesopotamia.

The world's map differed much from that which we know.There was no Mediterranean Sea. The prototype of the Nile, the Styx, turned at the site of the Nile's present mouth and flowed west for a thousand miles to the Western Ocean. Most of the bulge of modern western Africa lay beneath the sea.

Land stretched unbroken by the arms of the sea from a coast several hundred miles west of the present British Isles and the coast of France, eastward to the Vilayet Sea, on the site of the present Caspian but not much larger. Nomadic tribes from the steppes east of the Vilayet, the Hyrkanians, swept around the Vilayet to erect the kingdom of Turan (resembling the Ottoman Empire) along the western shores of the sea.

Between Aquilonia and the ocean lay the broad Pictish Wilderness. The Picts resembled American Indians of the eastern woodlands. North of Aquilonia and its neighbors Nemedia and Brythunia were the barbarous lands of Cimmeria, Vanaheim, Asgard, and Hyperborea. South of Stygia rose semi-civilized black kingdoms; beyond these, in the tropical jungles of Kush, barbarous black tribes struggled. Southeast of the Hyborian lands lay Iranistan and Vendhya, corresponding to modern Iran and India. Thousands of miles to the east, beyond the vast Hyrkanian steppes, stood ancient Khitai, the analogue of China.

The northern and western marches of Aquilonia formed a frontier region called the Bossonian marches, inhabited by Aquilonian frontiersmen and by garrisons of soldiery deployed against the Picts on the west and the Cimmerians on the north. As Aquilonia's population grew, settlers invaded the lands of the Picts and the Cimmerians. Sometimes the primitive tribesmen united to drive the invaders back.

One Aquilonian outpost in southern Cimmeria was Venarium. About 10,000 B.C., the Cimmerian clans put aside their feuds to overrun Venarium, forcing the Aquilonians out of the territory.

Conan, the Youth

One of the blood-mad horde that took Venarium is a youth who, though only fifteen and short of his full growth, is already six feet tall and weighs 180 pounds. This is Conan, the son of a Cimmerian blacksmith.

After Venarium, Conan returns to his tribe and for the next year or two occupies himself as a member of a band of AEsir, fighting the Vanir and the Hyperboreans. Captured by the latter (*Legions of the Dead*), he endures months of slavery before escaping (*The Thing in the Crypt*).

Instead of trying to return home, Conan plunges southward. At age seventeen he reaches the kingdom of Zamora, home of sinister sorceries. In the city of Arenjun, notorious for its thievery, he pursues the calling of thief. More daring than adroit, he is not very successful. He joins forces with a Nemedian thief, Taurus, to invade the tower of the priest-sorcerer Yara, whom even the king of Zamora fears worse than death (*The Tower of theElephant*).

Having disposed of the lions that Yara uses as watchdogs, Conan and Taurus scale the tower. On the roof they find a penthouse. Taurus enters but staggers out dying. Inside, Conan meets a spider with a body as large as that of a pig and legs of similar proportion. After a desperate combat, he kills the spider and goes below.

In a chamber he finds an extra-terrestrial being, resembling a man with an elephant's head. The being explains that Yara captured it long ago, blinded it, and has kept it under torture to wring magical secrets from it. The being commands Conan to kill it, cut out its heart, and take the heart and the gem called the Heart of the Elephant down to Yara's chamber. There he shall perform a grisly rite. Awakened from a drugged dream, Yara meets his doom, and Conan flees the crumbling tower.

Conan's next adventure befalls him in the capital of Zamora, Shadizar the Wicked. Becoming more expert at thievery, he visits the nearby ruin of Larsha in search of a rumored treasure (*Hall of the Dead*). Pursued by a squad of soldiers, he traps and destroys all but their officer. Conan and the captain join forces, find the treasure chamber, divide the loot, and then are chased out by the treasure's supernatural guardians. Then, back in Shadizar, each loses his share through misfortune.

Next, Conan tries to steal a noted amulet, the Eye of Erlik, from the wizard Hisarr Zul in Arenjun. The wizard, however, traps him and imprisons his soul in a mirror, to force Conan to do his bidding. His commmand to Conan is to follow and recover the amulet from the woman Isparana, who has already stolen it.

Soul again recovered, Conan tries paid employment as bodyguard to a Khauranian noblewoman. His job takes him to the little border kingdom of Khauran. There he thwarts a plot against the widowed queen. Then, after a sojourn among the nomadic Zuagirs of eastern Shem, he becomes involved in a sorcerers' struggle for the rule of Zamboula, governed by a Turanian satrap.

Soldier and Pirate

Fed up with Zamora (and vice-versa), Conan next wanders westward into Nemedia. In the city of Numalia, a young ne'er-do-well hires him to steal the fabulous diamond goblet of the dealer of antiquities, Kallian Publico. He gets into the dealer's temple-museum to find that the owner has just departed this life under mysterious circumstances (*The God in the Bowl*). While he wrangles with a guard, a squad of police and the city's chief inquisitor also come in.

Kallian had received a large copper cask consigned to a rival magician by the Stygian sorcerer Thoth-Amon. Thinking the cask to hold treasure, Kallian opened it and died. When the police try to seize Conan, he fights them off; then all but he flee the supernatural being the cask contained.

Having made Nemedia too hot for him, Conan shifts his larcenous career to a Corinthian city-state. Here he is betrayed to the police by his mistress. A young nobleman, Murilo, arranges for Conan to escape jail in return for Conan's promise to slay Murilo's enemy, the priest Nabonidus. Conan and Murilo invade Nabonidus' house, where they are trapped in the cellars and Conan fights a giant ape. They find Nabonidus unconscious, having been knocked senseless by the ape. Revived, Nabonidus agrees in return for his life to show them how to get out. But he double-crosses them and only Conan's quickness saves them (*Rogues in the House*).

Conan tires of the starveling life of a thief, especially since he loses his loot or it melts away before he has time to enjoy it. He trudges east to Turan and joins the army. There he serves for two years, learning archery and horsemanship and rises to the rank of

captain. His duties take him on journeys into Hyrkania, whither he is sent with the escort of the Princess Zosara to her affianced husband, a nomad khan. He travels even further east to fabled Khitai, to conclude a treaty between the king of Turan and a minor Khitaian kingdom (*The Curse of the Monolith*). In these journeys he is in conflict with the degenerate god-king of Meru and an amorphous man-eating blob of jelly.

Not even a commission in the Royal Guard of Turan keeps the turbulent Conan out of trouble for long. He falls out with his commander over a woman and slays the officer in self-defense. Fleeing, he hears of an opening for a soldier in the private guard of the cult of the spider-god in Yezud, in northern Zamora. The high priest of Zath is a fanatic, with dreadful plans for eliminating all rival cults and then bringing Zamora under the sway of his own sinister deity — who, Conan learns, is not just a huge black statue of a spider.

When the high priest's plans collapse in blood and fire, rumors of treasure bring Conan back to Zamora. He obtains a map showing the way to a golden, ruby-crusted, man-sized statue of a god in the Kezankian Mountains. Thieves steal the map. While he is tracking them, he is forced to join forces with them against the Kezankian hillmen. He finds the treasure, is betrayed by his surviving partner in crime, and then the statue takes a hand.

Disgusted with civilization, Conan returns home to his bleak northland. He joins his old friends the AEsir on a raid into Vanaheim, is the sole survivor of a battle with Vanir, and has a strange encounter with the legendary Atali, daughter of the supernatural frost-giant, Ymir (*The Frost Giant's Daughter*).

Bored with the drab, simple life of the Cimmerian villages, Conan, now in his early twenties, rides back towards the Hyborian kingdoms. He is sure they will provide a market for his sword. Crossing a glacier, he saves a Hyperborean girl from a band of Neanderthalers (*The Lair of the Ice Worm*). But then he loses her to the ice worm — a gigantic, white-furred creature with hypnotic powers. After vengeance on the worm, he continues southward and for several years serves the princes of Nemedia, Ophir, and Argos as a *condottiere*.

On Argos his mercenary service is cut short by a typical misunderstanding with the law (*Queen of the Black Coast*). Fleeing the port of Messantia, he boards a trading ship, the *Argus*, bound for the black coasts of Kush. The ship is captured by a galley of black corsairs, commanded by Belit, a Shemitish pirette. All the Argosseans are slain. When Conan is cornered against the mast of Belit's *Tigress* and the deck is heaped with corpses, Belit calls off the fight and offers Conan a partnership, both on deck and in her private cabin.

So Conan becomes a pirate. With Belit he raids the black villages of Kush and seizes the ships of the Stygians. Belit has a special grudge against the Stygians, since the Stygian slavers once captured and mutilated her brother. Conan and Belit are drawn into a struggle between the Stygians and a rebellious province, Taia, in the northeast of the country. With Conan's help, the Taians secure their independence. Conan and Belit leave the Stygian port of Khemi by the light of a vast conflagration, as Conan burns the Stygian ships and waterfront.

In Conan's never-ending, ever-thwarted pursuit of treasure, an ill fate takes the *Tigress* up the black Zarkheba River to the lost city of an ancient winged race. Here the sole survivor of that race slays Belit. It would have killed Conan, pinned by a column fallen across his legs as a result of an earthquake, did not the spirit of Belit daunt the winged ape long enough for Conan to free himself.

Belit's crew also perish. Conan puts Belit aboard the *Tigress*, heaps her jewels about her, and sets the ship aflame out to sea. Belit was the great love of his life, and he does not follow the sea again for many, many years.

Conan heads inland and becomes the warchief of a native tribe, the Bamulas (*The Vale of Lost Women*). An Ophirean woman, Livia, has been brought as a captive to the chief of another tribe, the Bakalah. Conan and a force of Bamulas visit the Bakalah to discuss a joint attack on a third tribe. During the parley, Conan betrays his host and slaughters the Bakalah. Livia has agreed to give herself to Conan if he will rescue her, but during the fight she flees to a hidden valley. Here she falls in the grasp of the supernatural. Conan saves her but sends her home, saying she is not rugged enough to be the consort of the war chief of a Kushite tribe.

Then the Bamulas rebel against the rule of a white stranger. Conan flees north. After a narrow escape from a demon in a ruined citadel (*The Castle of Terror*), Conan resumes the trade of mercenary in the army of the kingdom of Kush. (Northerners use "Kush" for any black country; but this kingdom, on the coast of the Western Ocean between Stygia and the jungles, is the one that knows itself by that name.) Kush, whose people are of mixed blood, is ruled by a ferocious queen, Tananda.

Conan is hired when he saves the queen from a hostile mob in the capital city (*The Shout in the Dark*). He becomes Tananda's lover; but relations sour when Conan rescues a white slave, Diana, from the queen, who is about to torture her to learn of a conspiracy. The common folk revolt against the ruling caste, and Conan escapes with Diana.

Conan now takes up his trade of mercenary soldier in the city-states of Shem. He takes part in the upheavels during the death of the mad king, Akhirom of Pelishtia (*Hawks over Shem*).

Conan takes service under Amalric of Nemedia, general for the queen-regent, Yasmela, of the small border kingdom of Khoraja. Conan rises to the rank of captain. Yasmela's brother, King Khossus, is a prisoner in Ophir, and the horde that follows the sorcerer Natohk threatens her borders. When Yasmela begs the oracle of the god Mitra for his advice, she is told to choose the first man she meets in the street as the commander-in-chief. The lot falls on Conan, who though surprised, quickly adapts himself to circumstances. In the battle with the horde, Conan wins the day and the queen (*Black Colossus*).

Conan is taken with Yasmela enough to talk of marriage. But to wed the queen-regent to a foreign barbarian is out of order for the Khorajans. Hoping that her brother, back on his throne, might fix things, Conan sets out with an astrologer and a thief to spring Khossus. He carries his project through despite bandits and the astrologer's treachery.

Khossus, however, proves a well-meaning but pompous young ass, who vetoes Conan's wedding his sister. Anyway, Conan is disenchanted with being "Mister Queen"; so he leaves Khossus on the latter's way home.

The Shaker of Thrones

Now past thirty, Conan takes service with a rebel prince of Koth. But the prince's army is defeated, and Conan gravitates to the steppes between Zamora and Turan. He and other fugitives form a band of freebooters, the kozaki, who harry the borders of neighboring lands. But the Turanian king, Yildiz, sends out an army, which destroys all the kozaki but Conan.

Hiding from pursuers on the shores of the Villayet Sea (*Shadows in the Moonlight*), Conan happens upon a confrontation between the Turanian general and a runaway slave, Olivia, a daughter of the king of Koth. Conan kills the Turanian and makes off with Olivia in a rowboat. Taking shelter on an island, they find a ruined hall with sinister iron statues. The island also harbors a giant carnivorous ape. To further complicate matters, a crew of pirates lands. After captures, escapes, fights and flights, the pirate ship sails with Conan as captain.

As chief of this mongrel Red Brotherhood, Conan is more than ever a thorn in Yildiz's side. This mild, ineffectual monarch, instead of having his brother Teyaspa strangled in the approved Turanian manner, exiled Teyaspa to a castle in the Colchian Mountains belonging to the bandit Gleg. Yildiz sends General Artaban to destroy the pirates at the mouth of the Zaporoska River.

Surprised, Artaban becomes the pursued instead of the pursuer. He arrives in the neighborhood of Gleg's castle, with Conan in pursuit. In a free-for-all among Turanians, Hyrkanians, Conan's pirates and a horde of hibernating vampires, Prince Teyaspa dies a moment too soon to be hailed as king of Turan. Instead the throne is claimed by the fierce Yezdigerd (*The Road of Eagles*).

Deserted by his pirates, Conan next appears as captain of the Royal Guard of Queen Taramis of Khauran (*A Witch Shall Be Born*), another little border kingdom which Conan had visited years before. Taramis has matured into a lovely woman; but a curse hangs over her family. Every century, a girl witch is born to the dynasty. This time the witch is Taramis' twin sister Salome, who gets control of Khauran and imprisons her sister with the help of the adventurer Constantius.

Conan Crucified

Conan realizes the substitution and fights, but is overwhelmed. Here occurs the most famous scene in the saga. Conan is crucified. As he hangs on the cross, preparing to give up his oversized ghost, a vulture flies down for a peck at his eyes. Conan bites the vulture's head off. You can't ask for a tougher hero than that.

Conan is saved by wandering Zuagirs, with whose help he turns the tables, destroying Salome and her toad-demon. At the end, he leaves Constantius, in his turn, nailed to a cross.

Conan spends nearly two years with the Zuagirs, becoming a chief. When a Zamorian, Vardanes, betrays Conan's band into a Turanian ambush, Conan routs the ambushers and pursues Vardanes (*Black Tears*). At the oasis of Akhlat, he catches up with the traitor, to find that the latter has been turned to stone by the gaze of a gorgon. Conan comes close to the same fate.

Arriving in Zamboula with the reward from the people of Akhlat, Conan quickly dissipates this fortune in a colossal debauch. A week of guzzling, gorging, roistering, whoring, and gaming reduces him to penury (*Shadows in Zamboula*). Zamboula is ruled by a Turanian satrap, Jungir Khan, and his Stygian mistress. The city is also infested by cannibal slaves from Darfar. In the background are the sinister priest Totsrasmek and the fabulous magical jewel, the Star of Khorala, for which the Queen of Ophir has offered a roomful of lustrous gold.

In the ensuing unpleasantness, Conan acquires the Star and rides westward towards Ophir. He aids the Queen Marala to escape from her degenerate husband, King Moranthes II. The Star helps save them from Moranthes' soldiers (*The Star of Khorala*).

At the end, Marala heads north to Aquilonia, planning to buy an estate, while Conan goes east for another try among the kozaki. Yezdigerd's general sets a trap for Conan on the isle of Xapur (*The Devil in Iron*). Here Conan finds the girl who is supposed to be bait, and also the city's master, Khosatral Kel, a giant of living iron.

Under Conan's command, the kozaki and pirates become such a nuisance that King Yezdigerd pauses in his imperial conquests to crush them. Conan flees south with followers to Iranistan, to take service with Yezdigerd's rival, Kobad Shah (*The Flame Knife*). Falling out with this king, he takes his band, together with one of the king's favorites, Nanaia, to the ancient city of Yanaidar. Here he encounters an old foe, Olgerd Vladislav, and a magus, reviving an ancient cult for world conquest. In the conflict, all the involved forces are routed by the newly-awakened grey ghouls of Yanaider.

Conan drifts east, reappearing as a chief of the barbarous Himelian hillmen. He is now in his late thirties. King Yezdigerd uses the wizard Khemsa to remove the Vendhyan king from his path. The dead king's sister, the Devi Yasmina, sets out to avenge her brother but becomes Conan's captive (*The People of the Black Circle*). He pursues Khemsa, only to see him slain by the Seers of Yimsha, whom he had also served. Conan rescues Yasmina from the the Seers in time to repel the invading Turanians.

When Conan's plan for welding the hill tribes into a single force fails, Conan rides west to take service under Amalric, a rebel prince of Koth. The army is defeated, however, and Conan escapes into the desert with Natala, a girl he has picked up along the way (*The Slithering Shadow*). He comes upon the city of Xuthal, inhabited by a race of living dead and their slithering shadow-god, Thog. When the Stygian woman who rules the city double-crosses Conan once too often, he and Natala escape.

Back in the Hyborian lands, Conan enlists in an army raised by Argos for a war with Stygia. The army is destroyed. Conan is captured by desert riders, who take him to the legendary city of Tombalku, ruled by two kings representing the two castes (*Drums of Tombalku*). One king, Sakumbe, hails Conan as an old friend from Conan's corsair days and saves him from death by torture. Conan becomes co-king; but the ousted faction attacks. Conan falls afoul of Sakumbe's wizard and has to flee again.

He reaches the coast and joins a ship of the pirates of the Barachan Isles. While serving as a mate on a Barachan ship (*The Black Tower*), he goes to an island where the Stygian wizard Siptah is said to dwell, extorting tribute from seafarers by his control of storms. But Siptah had died, and the island is tenanted by his servant, a bat-man. As usual, Siptah's trasure proves elusive.

Slipping out of a tight spot in the pirate base of Tortage, Conan avoids a cut throat by rowing out to sea. When his boat sinks within sight of a passing ship, he swims to and boards the ship, commanded by a Zingarian buccaneer, Zaporavo (*The Pool of the Black One*). The Cimmerian soon gains the respect of the crew and the enmity of the captain, whose sleek mistress regards Conan with too friendly an eye. On an unknown island, Conan kills Zaporavo but then must cope with a race of supernatural black giants who worship a living pool of water.

For two years, Conan pursues a career as a privateer in the service of the king of Zingara. When the king's daughter, Chabela, is stolen by plotters (*Conan the Buccaneer*), Conan traces her to a tribe of black Amazons in the Kushite jungles, where she serves as a slave. With the help of Juma, a black chieftain whom he had once known as a fellow mercenary, Conan rescues Chabela and thwarts the efforts of his old enemy Thoth-Amon, the Stygian sorcerer, to rule Zingara.

Other Zingaran captains, jealous of the foreigner's rise, trap Conan and sink his ship. He escapes inland and signs up with a band of mercenaries serving the Stygians. He gets bored with duty at the frontier post of Sukhmet, but boredom vanishes when Valeria, a pirette serving in the same detachment, takes drastic action to repel the advances of an officer and flees. Conan follows her to another lost city, Xuchotl (*Red Nails*), inhabited by two feuding clans. Conan sides with one clan but is double-crossed by its leader. The final fracas ends with gore all over and Conan and Valeria the only survivors.

Hearing of the priceless jewels called the "Jewels of Gwahlur," Conan offers his services to the king of Keshan to train his armies for a war against neighboring Punt (*The Teeth of Gwahlur*). But the scheming Shemite Zargheba arrives first at the deserted city of Alkeenon, where the jewels are hidden. Zargheba perishes, leaving the Corinthian slave girl Muriela, whom he had brought along to play the guardian goddess and beguile the native priests. In the end, Conan is forced to choose between letting either Muriela or the chest of jewels fall from a natural stone bridge into the river below. With his usual chivalry, he saves the girl and lets the jewels go.

To salvage something from his latest abortive treasure hunt, Conan takes Muriela east to Punt (*The Ivory Goddess*), where he passes off Muriela to the king and priests as their local goddess, Nebethet. During a standoff in the temple between Conan and Thutmekri, Nebethet herself settles the argument.

The Barbarian King

Conan works his way north to Aquilonia, where he joins the army as a scout on the Pictish frontier (*Beyond the Black River*). In the forests, the wizard Zogar Sag is gathering swamp demons to help the Picts against the Aquilonians. Conan fails to save Fort Tuscelan, but he does warn and save many settlers. Later he beats the Picts at Massacre Meadow (*Moon of Blood*).

Promoted to general, Conan defeats the Picts in a great battle at Velitrium. The jealous King Numedides lures Conan back to Tarantia and has him drugged and thrown into prison; his friends, however, get him out. Back at the frontier, he finds a price on his head. Swimming Thunder River, he sets out across Pictland to the sea once again.

On the way, he finds the cavern containing the treasure of the pirate Triancos but has a close call with the guardian demon. On the coast, others seek the same treasure; Count Valenso, a Zingar-

ian exile, and two gangs of pirates (*The Treasure of Triancos*). Thoth-Amon takes a hand, the Picts attack Valenso's settlement, and Conan is lucky to escape with Valenso's niece.

Now in his early forties, Conan is picked up by a galley carrying friends from Aquilonia, seeking his leadership in a revolt against the degenerate Numedides. Thulandra Thuu, the wizard who controls the mad king, plants a female spy on Conan, who poisons him but underestimates the dose.

Conan recovers and, in a campaign through Aquilonia, invades the capital and confronts Numedides. When the king tries to stab Conan, the Cimmerian strangles him and crowns himself.

Conan finds a king's life no bed of houris. Within a year, plotters plan to kill the barbarian king. Conan might have lost his life to Thoth-Amon's sorcery had not Aquilonia's ancient guardian, the sage Epemitreus, called Conan's soul to him in sleep to furnish him with a magical symbol (*The Phoenix on the Sword*).

No sooner has this disturbance subsided than the king of Ophir begs Conan for help against Strabonus of Koth. Conan comes with 5,000 Aquilonian knights, to find both kings allied against him. The Aquilonians die fighting, and Conan is captured by the wiles of the wizard Tsotha-lanti.

A prisoner in the wizard's scarlet citadel, Conan escapes and releases a fellow prisoner, Tsotha's wizardly rival Pelias. With Pelias' help, Conan gets back to his capital, leads an army against the invading Kothians and Ophireans, and both treacherous kings are slain.

Two years later, sorcery strikes again. Nemedian plotters revivify a long-dead wizard, Zaltotun (*Conan the Conqueror*), with whose help they defeat Conan's army, capture the king, and go on to conquer Aquilonia. Again Conan lands in a dungeon. He escapes with the slave-girl Zenobia.

Returning by stealth to his kingdom, Conan learns that Xaltotun's power lies in a strange jewel, now stolen and on its way south. Conan pursues it as far as Stygia. There, in the bowels of a pyramid, he finds two gangs of priest-magicians fighting for the gem. Conan seizes the jewel, returns to Aquilonia, and destroys his enemies. He makes Zenobia his queen.

For the next dozen years, Conan is busy with domestic affairs. Then Thoth-Amon combines with other sorcerers to extirpate the obstacle to their world-conquering plans that Conan represents. When Conan takes his elder son Conn hunting in Gunderland (*The Witch of the Mists*), the Hyperboreans capture the boy to lure Conan into their clutches. Conan confronts Thoth-Amon in the castle of the witch Louhi, in the crypt beneath the black sphinx of Nebthu in Stygia (*Black Sphinx of Nebthu*), and again in Zambabwei, whose black warriors ride flying reptiles. He finally runs him to earth in the far south, at the citadel of the reptile-men (*Shadows in the Skull*).

For another dozen years, the kingdom runs smoothly. Then it is afflicted with a supernatural plague of red shadows, which carry off Aquilonians. The spirit of Epimetreus tells Conan that he, to save the world, must abdicate in favor of his son Conn and set out across the Western Ocean. Conan, now a gray-bearded widower, is not altogether reluctant.

With an old comrade of his piratical days, he sails westward to the archipelago Antillia, inhabited by descendants of the Atlanteans. The priesthood of the Xotli scour the world for victims to sacrifice to their insatiable demon-god. When that situation has been cleaned up, Conan sails away to the unknown western continents. To what end he finally comes, the legends say not.

After Conan

Five hundred years later, Aquilonia had become an empire, annexing its neighbors. With Aquilonian arrogance came the hatred of the subject peoples. Meanwhile, the Picts were learning how to make weapons and armor of iron.

While Aquilonia waged its perennial war with Nemedia, the Picts overran Aquilonia from the west. Soon after, the Turanians and other Hyrkanians invaded the Hyborian lands from the east, until the scene of Conan's adventures was divided between Picts and Hyrkanians. Then came the northern barbarians — Cimmerians, AEsir, and Vanir — who poured down into and occupied these lands. Little civilization survived.

Another Catastrophe soon changed the map. The Pictish Wilderness sank beneath the waves, and the lower Styx spread out to become the Mediterranean. The Villayet Sea shrank to the present Caspian, while West Africa arose from the ocean.

After another lapse of several thousand years, the nations known to history began to emerge from the darkness of barbarism. Thus, Egypt was formed from a mixture of the common folk of Stygia and Vanir who conquered the country, while the Gypsies are of mixed Zingarian-Zamorian descent. Other mixtures gave rise to the other peoples of today.

Robert Ervin Howard

Robert Ervin Howard (1906-36) is a tragic figure in American letters, who long after his death became a major influence in fantasy. His father spent his adult life in Texas as a country physician. Robert was born in Peaster, Texas, and during his boyhood, his parents moved repeatedly. In 1919 they bought a house in Cross Plains, at the center of the state, and Robert lived the rest of his life there.

While a boy, Robert Howard resolved to become a writer. Save help from a couple of sympathetic high school techers, he was entirely self-taught. As a young boy, he was often bullied because of his puny size and bookish disposition. Later, by weight-lifting and exercise, he built himself into a powerful man, 5'11" tall and 180-200 pounds. He became an accomplished boxer and rider, and for awhile he owned his own horse.

Graduating from high school, Howard rejected advice to go to college and instead plunged into writing, for several years without success. He did take non-credit commercial courses at nearby Howard Payne College. He tried a number of jobs but proved unable to hold any for long. Obsessed by hatreds and grudges, he so fiercely resented any correction or discipline that when the boss gave him one order too many or scolded him for some fault, Robert blew up, threatened to beat up the boss, and either quit or was fired.

In 1926, Howard began to sell stories to the pulp magazines. A prolific and versatile writer, he wrote fantasy, Westerns, boxing stories, detective stories, horror tales, stories of historical and oriental adventure, and poetry. By Depression standards, he made a fair living from his writing.

Howard developed a distinctive prose style, using poetic elements such as rhythm, alliteration, and personification. In the late 1920s, he specialized in boxing stories; in the early thirties in fantasy, and in the middle thirties in Westerns, although he wrote stories of all these kinds throughout his career. He began the Conan stories in 1932.

Howard's present revival is due to the Conan stories. Conan is an idealization of what Howard thought he would like to have been: a footloose, hell-raising, irresponsible adventurer, devoted to wine, women and strife. But, save for a powerful physique, a hot temper, and a chivalrous attitude towards women, Howard and Conan had nothing in common. Howard was shy, sensitive, upright, moral, law-abiding, courteous, compassionate, reclusive, introverted, bookish, and (though he denied it) intellectual. He did not attribute such qualities to Conan.

Howard suffered from isolation and from lack of worldly experience, professional contacts, travel outside of Texas, and access to big-city and university libraries. An even greater handicap was his family situation. While he often quarreled with his father - a man of brusque, overbearing manner - his devotion to his mother, which she encouraged, was abnormal. As a boy, he resolved to die when she did. For a year or so in 1934-35, he went with a young schoolteacher, but when she urged him to cut the silver cord, he indignantly rejected the advice. When, after a long illness, his mother was dying of tuberculosis, Howard, age thirty, with a promising career ahead of him, shot himself through the head. ▲

Easley

THE OAKEN SWORD

A raucous romp in medieval times

by Ian McDowell

Husbands who return home earlier than expected are a bloody pain in the arse.

I'd just kicked off my breeches and was preparing to show the pleasantly plump Lady Rhiannon what she'd been missing ever since she'd married a half-Saxon with all the bedroom finesse of a rutting bear (her words, not mine), when the chamber door burst open and there stood the rutting bear himself, all upwards of fifteen stone of him, with a bloody great Saxon axe hefted easily in one ham-hand. He didn't say anything; just grinned widely enough for me to count his rotting teeth. That smile had all the warmth of a pike's predatory gape and I didn't need to look at his flushed face to know he was angry.

My sword was in its belt downstairs in the Great Hall (where I was supposed to be sleeping) and even if I hadn't been unarmed and starkers, flight would have still seemed the best strategy, so I tossed the bedclothes over his head, dived past him, and was sprinting bare-arsed down the hall while he was still disentangling himself from the dirty linen.

The stairs were on my left. I plunged down them, three or four steps at a time, only to halt halfway between the upper and lower landings. A glimmer of torchlight from the Great Hall flickered across the swords of the men-at-arms who waited for me on the ground floor.

"There he is," snarled one.

"Let's gut the *Scotti* bastard!" chortled another with rather daunting enthusiasm.

Frantically I whirled around and scrambled up to the second floor. A shadow loomed above me on the landing. It was Sir Corwin, his axe raised and ready. Without hesitation, I dove straight between his legs, skidding on my hands and knees across the rough stones of the hall floor. From this crouching position, I bent forward and kicked backwards with my right foot, connecting solidly with his buttocks before he could turn around. I wasn't looking in his direction, but from the sound of things he pitched forward quite nicely and collided headlong with his ascending men. In less perilous circumstances, their mingled curses would have been music to my ears.

Muffled sobs echoed from behind Rhiannon's tightly shut door — there'd be no help from that quarter. My palms and kneecaps were skinned and bloody and my heart was straining uncomfortably at the bonds of my ribcage. I had to do something, but for the life of me could not think of what.

I leapt to my feet. Below me, Sir Corwin and his men were just beginning to sort themselves out. That left only one direction to flee in. Dashing down the hall towards what I knew was a dead end, I passed the guttering torch that provided the passageway's only illumination. I should have extinguished it or at least grabbed it for use as a weapon, but by the time that occurred to me Sir Corwin had already reached it and snatched it from its bracket. Axe in one hand, torch in the other, he sauntered towards me with a broad grin spreading across his porcine face. Behind him, his men egged him on.

"You've got him now, Sir!"

"Cut his bollocks off!"

And these were the same cheery lads with whom I'd been merrily carousing a few hours earlier. It was depressing to think that something as petty as an attempted dalliance with the Lady of the Manor could so change their good opinion of me. Fickle bastards.

I found myself backing into a cul-de-sac, for the hall ended in a narrow alcove that served as the castle privy (an unusual luxury that had no doubt been installed by Rhiannon's father, who had traveled as far as Byzantium and had become enamored of the civilized niceties common in the Eastern Empire). A wooden bench with a hole in its seat covered a narrow well sunk in the center of the floor. I hefted the bench and pitched it at Sir Corwin's knees. He went down and the torch went out.

In the darkness, I groped for the well and squirmed headfirst into it. The shaft was too narrow for me to drop freely to the bottom, and while this fact doubtlessly saved me from ending up with a broken neck, it also resulted in painful friction that tore skin from my shoulders and thighs as I wormed my way downwards. After much painful twisting and sliding, I ended up standing on my head in a cesspool of crap and foul water. Not an enviable position.

There wasn't enough room for me to right myself. Well, I reasoned, the reservoir had to be built into the bailey wall at around ground level, so that serfs could clean it out from time to time. Holding my breath and closing my eyes as my face sank into the disgusting muck, I butted forward with my head and connected with a wooden door of some kind, adding a large bump to my noggin in the process. I set my shoulders against that barrier and pushed off from the cesspool's opposite wall. For a nasty moment I thought it wouldn't budge, and my lungs felt near to bursting as I imagined myself stuck fast, upside down and choking in the filthy darkness. Fortunately, though I may be small I've never been a weakling, and the latch finally snapped and allowed me to tumble out into the moonlit outer bailey.

Illustrations by Jeff Easley

There was no time to lie in the mud and drink in the blessedly fresh air. I rolled to my feet and dashed across the murky yard. Running blindly through the shadows, I tripped over a large pig that squealed and inflicted a light slash across my lower thigh. Getting to my feet again, I limped towards the dark outline of the stable while softly cursing the offending porker. Ach, but it would be bloody ridiculous to have survived this far only to later die of an infected bite from an outraged sow.

I stumbled through the stable door. It was very dark inside the wattle-and-daub structure, but I was able to locate the groom from the sound he made where he snored drunkenly on the hay. After choking him until he stopped struggling, I stripped him of his garments without bothering to see if he was still breathing. Though I could not see their condition, the tunic and breeches felt quite soiled and turned out to be full of very hungry fleas. No matter: I was in no position to be a choosing beggar and anything was better than riding a horse bare-arsed. I found a decent, rather thick-bladed dirk in his belt and might have used it to hamstring Sir Corwin's horses if there had been more light. As it was, I dropped it down one of my newly acquired and ill-fitting boots and began to grope around in search of my stabled gelding. Finding him and saddling him up by the sense of touch alone was far from easy and yet I somehow managed it.

The commotion was just starting in the castle as I rode for the gate. I thanked every god I knew that the windlass used to crank the porticulus was broken and so they left the barrier up except in times of emergency. There were shouts on the barbican as I passed through, and a crossbow hissed by uncomfortably close to my left ear, and then I was galloping down the old Roman road that bore across the moor.

After some while, I slowed my mount to a cantor. At last, my brain was able to stop mechanically reacting and start thinking again. For a moment I shook uncomfortably as I remembered how close Sir Corwin had come to splitting my head with that wickedly sharp axe of his. That's life for you; just when you're about to settle down to a little innocent pleasure, some great lummox comes bursting in and mucks everything up and your whole evening goes sliding down the loo. Quite literally, in this case. All my plans for a restful few days in the quiet countryside were shot straight to hell - now I'd have to go galloping back to Caerleon with no armor or decent clothes, smeared with crap and dressed in sullied peasant rags. My usual drinking companions like Bors and Urien would laugh themselves sick and God alone knew what that puffed-up frog Lancelot or even Sir — perfumed twit — Perceval would say about my predicament.

I looked back over my shoulder. Still no sign of pursuit; I seemed to have made it. Well, so what if they all laughed at me; at least I was still alive because of my ready wits and how many of them could have managed the same? No point in whining; survival was the main and only thing, and I was no self-important arse like those gilded chevaliers I so bitterly despised, all stuffed to the bunghole with pompous dignity. At least I'd left the fire-breathing Sir Corwin with no small amount of rotten egg on his sweaty face.

I laughed and slapped my horse's neck. He snorted, exhaling a ring of pale mist, and quickened his pace. For the first time, I could pay some attention to my surroundings. Looking back, there was nothing visible of Sir Corwin's castle. The wind was fairly mild and the night wasn't as cold as it might have been. I rolled my sore neck and flexed my aching shoulders. Overhead, clouds swept across the moon in silvered billows and the stars gleamed like frozen jewels. All indignities aside, it was a fine evening to be full-bloodedly alive. Ach, but if I'd only had a chance to wrestle for awhile with Lady Rhiannon's sweet plumpness before having to make my abrupt departure.

The clatter of hooves on the fitted stones behind me brought me back to where I was. Cursing vigorously in the names of both Lugh and Jesu, I reined my horse down from the road embankment and onto the sloping heather. Of course, it was then that the most unhelpful moon decided to emerge full and bright from behind the formerly shielding clouds. Stupid orb, but at least it only illuminated a single pursuer.

Damn the man, didn't Sir Corwin know that the local lordling ought to have better sense than to venture out alone at night upon the wild moor? Well, I suppose that I should have been thankful for the wounded pride that kept him from bringing along his men-at-arms, but somehow I just couldn't feel particularly blessed by luck. Looking back, I could see that he was clad in some sort of full armor, though I didn't flatter myself by thinking that all the harness was on my account; there were always outlaws and disgruntled serfs about who'd just love to perforate their honored lord. Hell, where were they when you needed them?

He seemed to be losing ground, but then my mount stumbled in some sort of burrow and I actually heard the bone in his shank snap as he went down. Landing in a clump of gorse that set me to sneezing, I rolled out of my fall and ran for the steep-sided mound that loomed against the moon a hundred yards or so ahead. Scrambling up the loamy slope, I sat down to catch my breath with my aching back pressed against one of the standing stones that capped the ancient barrow.

Sir Corwin guided his mount around my poor, thrashing gelding and reined in below me. I could see his armor more clearly now. He'd put a hauberk on over the leather gambeson he'd worn earlier and instead of the more common conical helmet, he'd donned one of those new-fangled *heaumes* that cover the entire head like an overturned pot. Quite a formidable ensemble.

"Come on down and fight me, you bastard!" he roared, with a fine obliviousness to my unarmed and unarmored state.

"Now wait a minute!" I protested, trying to sound calm and reasonable. "Can't we talk about the problem first?"

He dismounted, leaving behind his shield, longsword and lance, but hefting his all-too-familiar axe. "Talk? I'll talk all right, I'll talk to your stinking head after I've severed it from your misbegotten body!"

If I hadn't been so exhausted I'd have darted down the opposite side of the barrow and played hide-and-seek with him around the mound until I got a chance to try for his horse, but as I only had the strength for one last effort, I dared not lose the advantage of the higher ground. "Listen," I said, still trying to get my wind. "Perhaps you don't know that I'm a blood relation to the King!"

He actually laughed. "I'd chop you up if you were the second son of God Himself! And if you won't come down to me, I'll just have to climb up to you." And he began to do exactly that.

It had rained in the late afternoon and early evening and there was still plenty of mud. I palmed a handful. When he was six feet from me, I threw it on and into his narrow eyeslit and launched myself after it. Fortunately, he parted company with his axe as he went over backwards.

People do tend to underestimate my brawn. Despite my overtaxed condition, I still managed to wind up on top of Sir Corwin without adding too many more bruises to my poor frame. But then things got nasty.

His massive arms encircled my waist and he smashed my nose with the brow of his helm. I'd already drawn my knife and had managed to keep my grip on it. Now, I stabbed for his eyes, but the slit was too narrow for the thick blade and my point got wedged. His grip didn't weaken but I was able to squirm just enough that he was crushing my hips instead of my ribs and then my hand found a blessedly convenient rock. With all my strength I hammered at the pommel that projected out from his shielded face. He bucked and twisted and had almost thrown me off when the point went through. After the first spasm, his struggles gradually became less and less effective, though he did manage to butt my jaw hard enough that I nearly bit through my tongue. Shortly after that it was all done and I could roll off the corpse and begin to puke.

That done, I lay on my back in the cool grass. My breath came in heaving sobs. I think I may have been unconscious for a brief time, but I'm not sure. I've no idea how long it was before I became aware of the woman standing atop the mound, framed by the moon above her and the two squat menhirs on either side.

I wiped the sweat from my eyes and propped myself up on one elbow to get a better view. Gods, but she was tall, taller even than my Aunt Morgan, and nearly as swarthy as a Pict. Her face had high cheekbones, a snub nose, and very strange, very large eyes that actually seemed to shine with

a light all their own. Barefoot and bareheaded, she was clad in a coarsely woven gown the color of fine ash, and her unbound hair floated about her shoulders like an inky wavering cloud.

And then it hit me; despite the dim moonlight, I was seeing her just as clearly as if it were a bright summer's day.

I could even see the color of her eyes. They were very grey and very cold. And when she spoke it was in a voice like silver bells tolling underneath the sea. I'd never heard the language before, yet I understood the words.

"Little man, you have profaned a sacred mound by spilling mortal blood."

Oh bloody hell, I *would* have to make my stand against Sir Corwin upon an entrance to the Otherworld. I remained fairly calm, if only because I'd used up my store of terror and had nothing but numb acceptance to fall back on. Scrambling to my feet, I made as elegant a bow as I could manage — a lack of proper manners can be fatal in such an encounter.

"Forgive me, Fair Mistress of the Hollow Hill, for I did not realize that I had trespassed in your domain. Allow me to introduce myself, I am . . . ."

She cut me off with a wave of her slim brown hand. "No need for that. You are Mordred Mac Lot, Prince of the Orcades. And despite your surname, your true father is Arthur ap Uther, the Pendragon. My Realm is very well informed."

I started to make a comment about bastardy running in my family, but checked it, for the Old Ones have at best an uncertain degree of humor. "That is true," I agreed, "and I am also nephew to Morgan, Queen of Gore. Perhaps you have heard of her."

Her smile was scarcely warmer than the late Sir Corwin's had been. "Do not think that you can escape my wrath by that virtue of your blood. The sister of your father is well known to me, for she is much of the Otherworld and holds great power there. But she could not save you even if she so desired, for my Realm is older than hers and my right here shall not be denied."

No point in trying to bluster it out. I went down on one knee and bowed my head. "I can only beg your pardon, Lady."

There was silence, except for the sound of the wind whistling through the tall grass and the ancient stones. Finally, she spoke.

"Arise, and put aside your fear, for I give you back your life, though I doubt you'll thank me for it."

I stood and waited for the other shoe to fall. It wasn't long in coming.

"I make but one command of you, and for that boon I shall be well satisfied. Know this: in the deep forests beyond the Skyl Llug hills of that land you call Lyonesse there grows a mighty oak. Indeed, it is the oldest oak in Albion and the greatest also, for its height is immeasurable and its thickness at the base is equal to that of a fortress' keep. Beneath its roots is dug an ancient chamber, carved out of the living tree and lined with

It was a genuine marvel I was still alive, and things really had to be downhill from now on, and it was all very exciting and would make a fine tale for my future grand-bastards.

holy stone. This was a sacred place to those forgotten folk whose arts and rites were but reflected faintly in the practices of the Cymric Druids. In that chamber will you find an object carved of wood and fashioned in the semblance of a sword. That oaken sword was born of the heartwood of a tree that was once a god, and as such is a talisman of great power. Bring it here to me and I will release you from your service. But if you fail, or forget your charge, you will surely die. Return not to this mound before the next moon's waning and you will sicken and be in your grave before winter's breath first chills the heather blooms."

"Oh my God," I murmured to myself.

She shook her head. "He will not help you, for you are not His creature."

"Lady, please," I stammered. "I am not fitted for this task. Now, if you will just allow me to return to Caerleon, I will gladly find someone who is." I was already racking my brain for some way to convince Arthur's knights to take up such a challenge.

She laughed again, with no more warmth than before. "Foolish man, you are excellently fitted for this task. You believe in nothing but yourself and so can call on no higher power to free yourself from such a bond. You have a weasel's instinct for self-preservation and a fox's eye for the main chance. You have intelligence and strength to spare, and though those qualities may be balanced by a certain lack of valor, you find little need for bravery when your back is to the wall. Gallant knight, I could find none better if I searched the land for twice a hundred years."

"Damn it all," I protested. "This just isn't fair! I'm half dead with exhaustion, bruised, cut, and in no small amount of pain. And now this!" Regaining control of myself, I broke off, fearful of her possible response.

Fortunately, she seemed oblivious to my ill-considered anger. "I am not cruel, and so I leave you with this one gift." And with that she was gone, though whether she sank back into the barrow or simply faded away into the moonlight I really couldn't say.

I sat down and buried my face in my hands. My misfortune was so extreme that it would have been comic if it had happened to anyone else. "Damn you, just who do you think I am, your bloody Job, maybe?" I blasphemed at the God of my Christian father, while flipping an obscene gesture in the metaphorical direction of Lugh and Ogma. What good are deities if they can't keep one out of such predicaments?

Gradually it dawned on me that I was no longer filthy. I examined myself. The dried blood was gone from my arms and legs, my hair felt clean and dry and free of excrement, my aches and pains had vanished, and there was no sign of the pig bite on my thigh. I felt strong and rested.

All of which was a small blessing, but I would gladly have taken back all of my infirmities and a case of the bum-boils besides, if it only meant that I was free from my unpleasant obligation.

There was no real point in wondering why she had set me such an unfortunate task. The motives of the Old Ones are arbitrary and often incomprehensible, and it would be futile to speculate on why she wanted the oaken sword or considered its retrieval a fitting atonement for my transgression. For all I could know, the whole thing was just a capricious whim, and in the end it made precious little difference. I tried to be content with telling myself that it was a genuine marvel that I was still alive and that things really had to be downhill from now on and it was all very exciting and would make a fine tale for my future grand-bastards.

Myself gave me the response I bloody well deserved. Even if everything went silk-smooth from this point on, I had killed a man and while *that* was no great loss, there were bound to be all kinds of complications, probably chief among them the fact that Sir Corwin had at least one younger and even larger brother who would be sure to remember the fine old custom of the blood feud that he'd doubtlessly heard about at his Saxon mother's knee. Well, when this was over, perhaps I'd pay a long visit to Queen Morgawse in Orkney. It had been quite some time since I was last there and it was faintly possible that Mum would be fairly glad to see me. Bugger all, but why can't these idiotic adventures happen to the people who deserve them! I sometimes find it hard to laugh at what seems to be life's idea of comedy.

I stood up. My clothes might be clean, but they were hardly fit for my station in life. And the fleas were still present. So I walked over to the unlamented Sir Corwin and stripped him of his clothes and armor (except for the helm, which I had to leave as it was pretty solidly nailed on him). The gambeson and breeches were too large, but they were free of infestation.

Something moved in the darker shadows some twenty paces away. It was Sir Corwin's horse. I caught it and tied it to a low bush before putting my gelding out of his misery with Sir Corwin's lance. That weap-

on, along with his sword and rolled-up hauberk, I ended up tying alongside his horse's saddle. After adjusting the stirrups for my shorter legs, I mounted up and rode away.

The landscape changed. By sunrise I smelled the sea and well before noon I sighted it. The narrow strands that lie between Cornwall and the dark hills of Lyonesse have always reminded me of the beaches of my Orkney boyhood; grey waves, black rocks, and piled-up clouds tumbling over the seaarim's edge. I'd regained most of my self-possession and even a bit of my normal confidence and was able to take pleasure in the stark and windworn beauty of the place. By the time the sun was high I was even feeling halfway jaunty. Whistling the old tune about the pig-keeper's proud daughter, I spurred the horse into something faster than his normal steady amble.

My spirits were only slightly dampened by the darkness that I saw boiling on the horizon, but I spurred the horse again in earnest. Such narrow fingers of land are not good places to be when the sea is high and angry. Indeed, it's a wonder that storms have not long since washed away that thin bridge of sand and stone and made Lyonesse an isolated island.

After spending the better part of two weeks searching the tangled depths of the forest and sleeping on the cold ground every night, I was rather glad to stumble across the woodcutter's cottage. Perhaps I could get directions there, for my allotted time was running short. And an indoor resting place would be most welcome; some of us just aren't cut out for the arcadian life.

The hovel stood in the middle of a squalid clearing. A one-eyed goat and a sickly sow added their imprints to the mud and rubbish, while a yellow dog with a torn ear and a bad case of ringworm circled my horse's hoofs, yapping furiously. The woodcutter, a squashed, toadlike man in a ragged tunic and mantle that might once have been dyed forest green, leaned on his axe and regarded me sourly. His hair was grey and thinning and he had rheumy codfish eyes and the filthiest beard I'd ever seen. Rather more pleasant looking was the girl who stood on the cottage threshold, regarding me curiously with interesting, wide green eyes. What I could see of her limbs beneath her patchwork autumn gown seemed shapely enough for all their scrapes and smudges and though her red hair was tangled and dirty, it framed a striking if not quite pretty face.

I dismounted and bowed politely. "Forgive my intrusion, good yeoman, but I'm weary from travel and in these dark woods I find myself in need of food and a night's lodging. Would you be so kind as to let me share your hearth?"

He spat and raised his axe. "No. We've no food or room to spare. Bugger off."

After my experience with Sir Corwin, I was sick and tired of having axes waved in my face. Among the Saxons even the lowliest farmers supposedly have absolute hearthright and now it seemed that a similar foolishness flourished here in Lyonesse. Well, I was in no mood to tolerate it at this point. The rustic lout needed to be reminded of his true place in the world.

I turned as if to go, but kept watching him out of the corner of my eye. When he lowered the axe I spun around and put my swordpoint right under his nose, drawing a spot of blood the size of a pea on his lip.

"Drop it please," I said politely. He lost no time in complying.

"I can see that you have little experience in dealing with the nobility," I continued as I sheathed my sword. "We tend to fall into two types. Those of the first type would tend to take great pleasure in opening up your considerable paunch and feeding your guts to that mangy dog. The other sort would graciously reward any hospitality on your part with a purse full of pretty gold coins. And it's your actions that will determine which category I belong to."

Doubly prodded by fear and greed, he was only too glad to lead my horse to his stable and rub it down while I went inside to warm my self before his fire. Before crossing the threshold, I squeezed the girl on her surprisingly hard rump and whispered, "don't worry, darlin,' your da is in no danger as long as he behaves." She drew back and glared at me like a cat with a stepped-on tail.

There was no furniture and the straw on the floor was old and musty, but there was a rabbit and woodcock stew cooking on the fire. Even better, there was a small, half-filled cask of beer hidden away under the straw that had piled up in one corner. Naturally, I availed myself heartily of both.

A rickety old ladder led to an upper loft where the woodcutter and his daughter evidently slept, but I didn't bother climbing it, for I had no intention of taking over their probably lice-ridden sleeping accommodations. Instead, I removed my gambeson and stuffed it with enough straw to make a decent pillow. Then I took down the fairly-well preserved bearskin that had been hung on the timbers of the far wall and spread it on the floor before the fire. It was nice to be able to doze in relative comfort for the first time in some while.

I woke up when the woodcutter and the girl finished whatever they'd been doing in the yard and came in for the night. The man glared hot pokers at me when he saw that I'd eaten most of his supper.

"Did you rub down my horse thoroughly and give him fresh hay?" I asked.

He nodded reluctantly. "Nice horse." The "better than his master" was unspoken but understood.

I ignored the surliness in his tone. "After you've eaten, go out to the stable and clean the mailcoat you'll find in my saddleroll. Use the jar of muttonfat that's wrapped with it."

He managed to keep his face fairly impassive. "What do you want here?"

"I'm looking for a tree. An oak, to be exact; the oldest and largest one in the forest. Perhaps you know of it."

He picked his nose. "Lots of oaks in these woods."

"Not like this one. You'd know it if you'd seen it."

His shrug was noncommittal. "Lots of oaks in these woods," he repeated. "One's like another." It seemed that I could expect little help from his quarter.

After I'd glared at him long enough he shambled out into the fading daylight, presumably to clean my hauberk. As soon as he was gone, the girl scrambled up from the far corner where she'd been furtively watching me and started to climb the ladder. "No need to run," I shouted up after her. "I'm much too tired to ravish you tonight." She didn't say anything, but I did get a nice glimpse up her skirt before she vanished into the darkness underneath the rafters. With that to ruminate on, I relaxed and slept again.

Which was very stupid, really. I didn't hear the woodcutter come back in and he'd almost reached me before I awoke to the sound of his stealthy footsteps. As I rolled aside, his axe thudded into my makeshift pillow. Before he could raise it again, I kicked his legs out from under him. Unfortunately, he landed on top of me. His powerful hands were immediately about my throat and despite my struggles he had little difficulty in bashing my head painfully against the hearthstones.

That had to stop. Instead of trying to break his grip, I broke his nose with the heel of my hand. He gasped and his hands flew to his damaged snout and I quickly threw him off. The fight was out of him and he just sat there on the floor, blood trickling between his fingers and down his face.

I picked up the axe, ready to use it if he showed signs of wanting to continue the struggle. His daughter, who had been watching the whole fracas from the foot of the ladder, evidently feared I'd use it on him anyway and launched herself at me.

"Please don't," she screamed, the first words I'd heard from her all evening. "Don't kill him, I can tell you where to find what you're looking for."

I tossed the axe into the fireplace. "Oh, can you now? Then I think you'd best be out with it."

She helped her father to his feet. "It's not a day's journey from here. I'll show you, first thing in the morning."

I nodded and sat back down. She helped him make it up the ladder and all was quiet. It was getting very dark. Confident that he'd shot his bolt and wouldn't try again, I lay back and slept once more.

My dreams were uneventful. Rising with the dawn, I was already up when the girl came creeping back down the ladder. She followed me meekly out to the stable, where I readied the horse for the day's journey. With her seated behind me, we rode out into the green morning.

She finally broke the silence. "Turn left where the path forks."

I did so. "How long a ride?"

"Most of the day." Her voice was small and toneless.

"You might as well tell me your name."

"Megan."

"Nice name."

The conversational possibilities seemingly exhausted, we rode on in silence. I could feel the tenseness in her as she sat stiffly upright, trying not to touch me.

"I'm not as bad as I might seem," I said at length. "Many would have killed your father and then forced you to tell them what they wanted to know."

"Aye, aren't we lucky," she sniffed. "That's like saying that a man with the pox should be glad he doesn't have leprosy too."

A clever girl. "Well, he should be glad," I countered. "Things can always be worse. Believe me, I know."

"You hurt him," she said sullenly. "His face was a mess this morning."

"Good. Maybe that will teach him not to try to split his guests' heads."

"You're no guest. We never asked you here."

I laughed. "No, you didn't. And I never asked to be here. But you got me whether any of us wanted it or not and a wise man might have accepted the situation with more help and grace."

"It wasn't that." Her tone was matter of fact. "He wanted your horse. Our ox died not long ago and we've since had no way to take the wood to market. Turn off the path here and follow the stream bed."

I found myself somewhat nonplussed by the bald way in which she'd put things. I'd noticed that there'd been a crudely whittled crucifix hanging over their fireplace. So much for the idea that religion makes the common people more civilized, not that I'd ever believed that fatuous dictum anyway.

We rode for hours under a green and brown ceiling that filtered down the sun in mead-colored, mote-filled shafts. The way was tortuous, leading through brambles and thick underbrush and shallow ponds where mosquitoes bred and swarmed. Finally, she directed me up to dryer ground where a double row of sentry oaks formed a natural alley so deep in fallen leaves that the horse sank to his knees in the crumbling mass. Then the path widened out into a huge clearing and a sight that took my breath away.

I thought of the old Saxon legend of Yggdrasill, for surely here was a tree huge enough to span the worlds. The gnarled, many-forked trunk was wider than a donjon, and it branched upward into a heaven-arching canopy that must have contained more foliage than a good-sized coppice, while at its base great roots twisted in and out of the ground like burrowing dragons. I had no idea how tall it was, for it seemed to tower forever skyward, and I could imagine its topmost branches gathering in the sun and moon and stars like so many speared carp. In that silent and musty gloom I felt infinitely diminished, like an ant beneath the toe of a god.

I could imagine its topmost branches gathering in the sun and moon and stars like so many speared carp. In the gloom, I felt infinitely diminished, like an ant beneath the toe of a god.

I dismounted and tied the horse to a branch of one of the suddenly tiny trees that fringed the clearing. Now to find the object of my quest. Centuries of leaves had fallen here, and as I waded through that morass of mouldy compost I had a sudden vision of myself as a child, happily burrowing into the abandoned leaf-choked drainage conduit behind Lot's squat castle. There were plenty of gaps and crevasses beneath the giant roots, and quite a few looked big enough to be the entrance to an underground vault. Finally, I found what seemed to be the one. It was wide and regular and though it was half-filled with detrius I could see the beginnings of a rock-lined stairway leading down into the darkness. It occurred to me that a veritable fortress could be created here in such a fashion, by men carving out tunnels and chambers in the trunk like so many giant industrious termites.

Suddenly there was a shifting and a dry rustling in the pile that obscured the downwards-sloping passageway. Something was moving there underneath the leaves.

A kettledrum-sized head emerged, a broad greyish-brown head with mossy green hair and a nearly featureless face that was decorated with a thin crack of a mouth and two oakgall eyes. Musty leaf fragments flew everywhere as the creature struggled out from beneath the mound, as slowly and as clumsily as a man in heavy armor. But it was much taller than any man, and several times as broad. As it moved, its limbs creaked like the timbers of an old ship riding a tossing violent sea.

Its arms were thick and gnarled and its legs were like tree trunks. I couldn't see its feet; I don't think it had any. It didn't seem to have any real sex, either, just a knotty bulge the size of my fist, and its skin was rough and whorled and wrinkled and looked very much like bark. It brandished a club as long as I am tall that seemed fused to the shapeless lump at the end of its right arm. The other "hand" was spade-shaped and fingerless. All in all, the creature looked very functional.

If I'd had any doubts about what its function was, they were dispelled when it clumped towards me, raising its club for a downward swing. I stumbled backwards, trying to keep out of its range and draw my sword at the same time. I was terrified of tripping, for though the monster was slow and clumsy, it plowed easily through the rotting leaves while I floundered knee-deep in the many-layered humus.

Ducking back just enough that the falling club actually tore skin from the tip of my nose, I cut upwards at that impassive face. It was a crude meatcleaver blow, but it was backed by all of my considerable strength, and I was shocked to see the edge sink in less than an inch. The impact numbed my arm and for a dreadful moment I feared my blade was stuck, but I wrenched it free just in time to dive headfirst under the creature's next swing and scramble on my hands and knees past its left leg. Sneezing violently from the leafy particles I'd stirred up, I struggled to my feet and faced my adversary once more.

As it turned toward me with the slow precision of a clockwork mannikin, I noticed for the first time the vine or root that was attached to the small of the creature's back, the other end trailing away to a spot underneath the leaves at the tree's base. But there was no time to wonder at the significance of that thick tendril, for I had tactics to consider carefully.

Abruptly, I remembered Lancelot directing my young half-brother's sword practice in a dusty courtyard, while I stood in the shadow of the rampart and made faces at the pompous Frenchman's back. "Use the point, not the edge," he kept repeating, "a good thrust is worth a dozen cuts." Although I'd laughed at little Gareth's clumsy thrusts, I'd seen the advantage of the technique. Lancelot may have been a preening, self-important frog, but I wasn't such a fool as to ignore any advice he'd cared to give when it came to armed combat. To his excellent rule I'd since added one of my own — when they're bigger than you, go for their balls.

My arm straightened out into an elegant lunging thrust, astonishingly well-executed considering the circumstances, and the gnarled lump between the monster's legs splintered under the impact of my point. The creature paid no more heed to the indignity than it had to the shallow, bloodless scar that now bisected its face. A couple of drops of what looked very much like sap trickled down its thighs, but that was the only reaction to my blow. Well, my luck was consistent with all that had gone before.

Suddenly in a very vulnerable position, I had no choice but to escape its deadly overhand swing by hurling myself between its massive legs. Instead of turning back to fight, I kept on going until I'd reached the edge of the clearing. The monster did not follow me for more than a few paces — its tether had been brought up short and it evidently did not want to break that connecting root. I circled the clearing to where Megan stood beside my nervous horse, her face flushed and her eyes downcast.

I heard the rustle of leaves as Megan approached. She bent over me. I felt something cold prick the back of my neck and to my horror I realized that she had a dagger in her hand.

"You didn't tell me about *that!*" I snapped angrily.

"You never asked me."

"Don't play games with me, lass. I assume that you wanted it to kill me."

She didn't bother lying. "I thought it just might."

"Yes, I'll bet you did." I looked as menacing as I could and was rather annoyed to see that she didn't quail. "Can it follow here? An honest answer, now!"

She shrugged. "I don't think it can go more than a dozen paces past the tree's base. I first came across it here when I was a little girl. I guess it's always been here. One of the old things, left over from the days of the flood. It would have killed me when I first found it, but I was too fast."

More likely it was a guardian put here by the dead folk who'd made their temple beneath the giant oak. Megan had probably assumed that I'd either stand transfixed with fear or else I'd chivalrously stand still and attempt to trade blows with the creature. Many of Arthur's knights would have been just that foolish.

I shoved her away from me, though not without booting her stoutly in the bum once to remind her of my displeasure. A strategy was needed. I thought of her father's wood axe, but though I could probably have used that tool to chop more deeply into the creature's body, I doubted that I'd be able to slay it before its club took my head off. A dozen men with axes might have managed to hew off a leg and bring it down, but I didn't have a dozen men. There was no point in getting my shield or hauberk, for neither would do much to stop one of its crushing blows and both would slow me down. My sword seemed just as useless, for I could hack away all day without adding anything more than minor cuts and gashes.

Wait a minute, there *was* one part of the creature's body that I could sever, assuming that the tendril was really part of it. Anything was worth a try.

I shuffled gingerly back through the clearing until I was just outside of the creature's reach. Its expressionless head tracked my movements and its club was raised and ready to fight. I feinted towards its belly, inviting the blow that swished past my ear as I ducked to the side and around behind its back. Pouncing on the tendril, I hacked furiously away at it, but it was thicker than my wrist and very tough.

Spurred into unexpectedly fast action, the monster whirled clumsily around and aimed a blow at me that would have driven my head down into my lungs. On my knees in the humus, I couldn't dodge in time, and so there was nothing for it but to try to parry the blow. Fortunately, the creature was at an awkward angle and somehow I managed to meet its club with my sword and more or less *push* myself out of the way of the heavier descent. My blade snapped and the club tore the mail sleeve from my hauberk as it crunched down, but I was still alive. My arm, fortunately my left one, was numbed and useless and the pain in my shoulder was excruciating.

The monster had overbalanced with its swing and fallen to its knees, the club sinking deeply into the leaves. Sneezing uncontrollably (God, the idea of dying with snot on my face), I drew my dirk and sawed frantically at the half-severed root. It parted just as the creature regained its footing. Stiffening suddenly, it fell like a log across my calves and feet. Thankfully, the cushioning humus kept my bones from being broken.

There was no way that I could have really known that the monster would crumble like a puppet with its strings cut once its tether was severed. I'd acted on a hunch, and I was alive because it paid off. No doubt the creature had drawn its vitality from the oak itself, like a fetus nourished through its umbilical cord.

My arm hurt, the tip of my nose was raw, my legs ached, and my shoulder was beyond pain and well on its way to agony. And I was suddenly aware that at some point during the battle I'd soiled my breeches. How embarrassing. Still, I was content to do nothing but lay there on my belly for awhile.

I heard the rustle of leaves as Megan approached. She bent over me. I felt something cold prick the back of my neck and to my horror I realized that she had a dagger in her hand.

Then the point was withdrawn. If she had been tempted to kill me as I lay sprawled on my stomach, she had evidently been unable to go through with it. Thank God she wasn't her da. Squirming out from under the weight of the dead (if that was the right word for it) monster, I rolled over and looked up at her. She started to jump back, but I grabbed her ankle and sent her sprawling. She did try to use her dagger then, but I caught her wrist in time and a good squeeze made her let go. Cursing my bruised and protesting joints, I somehow made it to my feet.

She just lay there on the ground with leaves sticking to her sweaty face. "Go ahead, rape me then," she sobbed.

It might have been an attractive prospect, but I was tired and sore and had further work to do. Besides, I wasn't a Saxon or a Pict or a drooling Irishman, to be getting my pleasure in such a crude fashion. Instead, I helped her to her feet and then walked away from her, back to my horse.

After watching me for awhile, she trudged off down the forest trail. I'm not such a fool as to believe that any woman wants to be ravished, yet I suspected that in not doing so I had somehow upset Megan's sense of the proper scheme of things.

After taking flint and steel from my saddle roll and reassuring my mount, I made a crude torch and finally managed to light it after a good deal of fruitless effort. The afternoon was almost over and I pointedly ignored the condition of the moon that was mounting the darkening sky.

With some trepidation, I approached the entrance to the underground chamber. Wading through the leaves, I ducked under the root-roofed ceiling and began to descend the downward sloping passageway. My flickering brand illuminated weathered stone steps and earthen walls veined with streaks of red and pink clay. Those soft, damp surfaces looked sickeningly fleshy, and I shrank away from them and tried to keep to the center of the shaft. Eventually, the roots and the dirt and the loam gave way to dark and oily wood. I was in the body of the tree itself, crawling downwards like one of those wood beetles who make their homes in fallen logs. Down and down I went, stooping beneath the grainy oak ceiling, uncomfortably aware of the vast weight pressing down on me from above. The steps were worn and slippery and very steep, and I had to be careful of my footing.

Finally, the stairs leveled out into a tunnel that in turn opened out into a rock-lined vault, low ceilinged, and bare of any decoration. The stone blocks seemed to have been fitted into the wood without the use of any sort of mortar. Moisture dripped down from them and collected in an ankle-deep puddle on the floor.

My torch was burning rather low and I was terrified of being left without any light, swallowed up by the thick and musty darkness. Frantically, I looked about for the object of my quest. Where the hell was the thing, anyway?

Finally I spotted it. It hung from the ceiling, snared in an octopus tangle of roots that had slithered out of a crack between two stones. It was as if the tree was trying to draw the sword back up into its own body. I grabbed it with my left hand and tried to tear it free.

It wouldn't budge. I tugged again, as hard as I could. And then my foot slipped in the water. Although I regained my balance in time to keep myself from falling, I had to drop the torch. Naturally, it went out.

I couldn't breathe. The darkness was all around, closing in on me like a sheet of slimy black velvet. The chamber was shrinking, I was sure of that; it was on the point of crush-

ing me between its stones. The blackness was full of hollow rustling sounds.

I groped upwards and my hand closed again around the oaken sword's hilt. With my other hand, I drew my dirk and began to chop away at the clutching roots. They seemed to writhe like a nest of angry snakes. Finally, the sword came free and I fell backwards, landing on my arse in a pool of cold water. Damn, but the seat of my pants was thoroughly soaked.

I got out of there as fast as I could, springing to my feet and dashing up the ancient steps. I stumbled several times, skinning my knees and tearing my woolen breeches. Once, I rebounded off one of the warm and yielding walls. Finally, I stumbled out into the twilight and collapsed onto the leaves, drinking in the clean and open air.

When my nerves had settled I examined the object in my hand. It was longer and lighter than any sword of metal, with a tapering point and a surprisingly sharp edge. The wood felt smooth and well-oiled and it glowed with a rich honey-brown sheen. Surely there was magic here, for such a thing to have remained unrotted for so many centuries in that dark space. I wondered at its powers. Not that I was in any position to experiment.

Sticking the sword in my belt, I wearily trudged back to my patient horse. It was almost over, now.

The ride back to Cornwall was tiring, but uneventful. Three days later I crossed the narrow strands and the Cornish headland and was clattering down the familiar road.

Like an idiot, I was thinking of nothing but getting the sword to the Faerie mound as soon as possible. No thought of the late but unlamented Sir Corwin and the incident that had started the whole mess occurred to me until I saw the three armored riders waiting for me beside the ancient track. "Ho, well met indeed!" shouted the tallest one. Though I didn't remember his name, I recognized him for the dead man's brother.

"Crap!" I exclaimed to no one in particular, as I reined my horse off the road embankment. Life was turning into one encounter after another; I might as well be living in a bloody chanson.

I probably wouldn't have been able to make it past them without a fight anyway. As it was, I had pushed my horse too hard over the past few days. He went down, the second mount to collapse in less than a month. I wasn't hurt, but the wind was knocked out of me and my left leg was pinned underneath the horse's bulk.

The tall rider dismounted. "The night after I buried my brother I prayed to God to be granted vengeance on his murderer," he said easily as he ambled down the embankment towards me. "And suddenly I had a vision, a vision in which I saw that if I waited here beside this road on this day, the murderer would come riding by. You've saved me a trip to Caerleon, you Orkney bastard."

I wish people would stop harping on my illegitimacy. Actually, his flash of precognition was more likely due to some partially latent gift of second sight, not uncommon in one born so close to a nexus of the Other world, than to any intervention on the part of the Almighty. Not that this was the time or place for such an explanation. At last I was able to wrench my leg free and rise unsteadily to my feet. One more unavoidable fight, I thought as my hand went to my sword hilt.

No, not mine, but to the hilt of the wooden weapon. Before I could let go, a strange power surged through my arm. The oaken blade came out of my belt seemingly of its own volition.

Sir Corwin's brother had already drawn his own weapon. Now, he shuffled towards me, his shield raised. Despite the apparent inappropriateness of what I was holding in my hand, he was evidently taking no chances and sticking to proper military form.

Not that it did him any good. I had no real control of my body and no actual conscious thoughts in the moment before we came together. Yet my arm came down, the oaken blade descending as heavily as a felled tree. The steel sword snapped under the impossible force of that blow. My enemy toppled backwards, cloven through the forearm and the shoulder blade.

The largest and bravest-looking of his companions charged me then, spurring his horse down the slope and lowering his iron-headed lance. I shouldn't have been able to sweep aside the point of that long and heavy weapon, but I did, and then I chopped deeply into his waist as he galloped past. Down he went, as dead as his master.

The third man had courage, I'll give him that. He charged me with just the barest hesitation, his spiked mace raised and ready. You can imagine his shock when I thrust up and through the lower part of his embossed shield, driving my wooden point into his hauberk and midriff. And then there were none. Three riderless horses galloped away across the rolling heather.

I felt stunned by such a ridiculously easy victory. Three men slain without working up a sweat; now I knew what it felt to be Lancelot. Lancelot, hell, here was a weapon the equal of Excalibur! Gods, but how I could lord it over the Round Table if I had such a fearsome power at my side. Arthur himself would kneel down before me and kiss my muddy boot and if he didn't, why then I'd just raise the oaken sword and . . . .

It was worth it all, the discomfort, the danger; the pain, and all the rest. Almost laughing with glee, I cast aside my steel sword and thrust the oaken weapon into the now empty sheath.

As soon as it was out of my hand, the strange exultation passed and I could reflect on the matter a bit more cooly. The idea of trying to conquer the Round Table was absurd. I'd never succeed. Besides, hadn't I had my fill of danger?

The conflict raged within me as I walked the half mile or so to the barrow. One part of me was delighted by the sheer audacity of the idea, the other part trembled at the frightful risk involved. In that frame of mind, I stood before the stone-capped mound. Night was coming fast.

The dark lady appeared shortly after the sun's red edge had sunk beneath the distant hills. She regarded me without surprise or pleasure. I felt my hand clench around the sword's smooth hilt.

"Well," she said, "give me what I set you to find. I see you have it there in your hand."

"I am thinking," I replied, "that this weapon has many interesting properties. And one such might be that while I hold it your magic cannot touch me." It was a crazy idea that had come to me out of nowhere, but as soon as I said it I knew that it was true. With the sword in my hand, I felt confident and invincible.

She reacted to my defiance without the slightest bit of surprise and only a small amount of resigned annoyance. "That is true," she agreed. "I cannot touch you when you hold that Power in your hand. But I never sought it for myself, but for my lover. He is older than I, and much more powerful."

And with that, an immense shadow reared up beside her. I didn't get a good look at it as it swept down the side of the barrow towards me, but I could make out a huge, man-shaped form with blazing coal-sized eyes that glowed beneath a shaggy brow capped with a spreading pair of immense antlers. All defiance gone in the face of the gut-freezing terror that swept over me, I tossed the sword at the dark shape and turned to flee. A tremendous force dashed me face-first to the ground and all I could do was lie there, gasping and paralyzed and ready for death.

It never came. Still quaking, I rolled over and sat up. The top of the mound was empty of everything but the squat menhirs.

So much bloody work, and all for nothing in the end. Nothing but my life. I was left with one thing; the memory of that dark vision of seductive power. The ambition remained, gnawing lightly like a tiny worm in the apple of my mind. For the time, I decided to ignore it, but I knew it would not go away.

At least I was my own man again. I don't know who really rules this world, whether it be the gods of my Gaelic heritage or grim and one-eyed Woden or the Christians' humble carpenter. Perhaps those Saxons have it best who swear by *Wyrd*, their personification of uncaring fate. Whomever it was, I hoped they had enjoyed the spectacle they'd made of me these past few busy and intrepid weeks.

Finally getting to my feet, I turned my back to the mound and trudged eastward, in the direction of the late Sir Corwin's castle. His bereaved widow would still be observing the formality of mourning. Somehow, I knew it would be just a mere formality.

By Lugh and Wyrd and Jesu, I'd end up with *something* for my pains. ▲

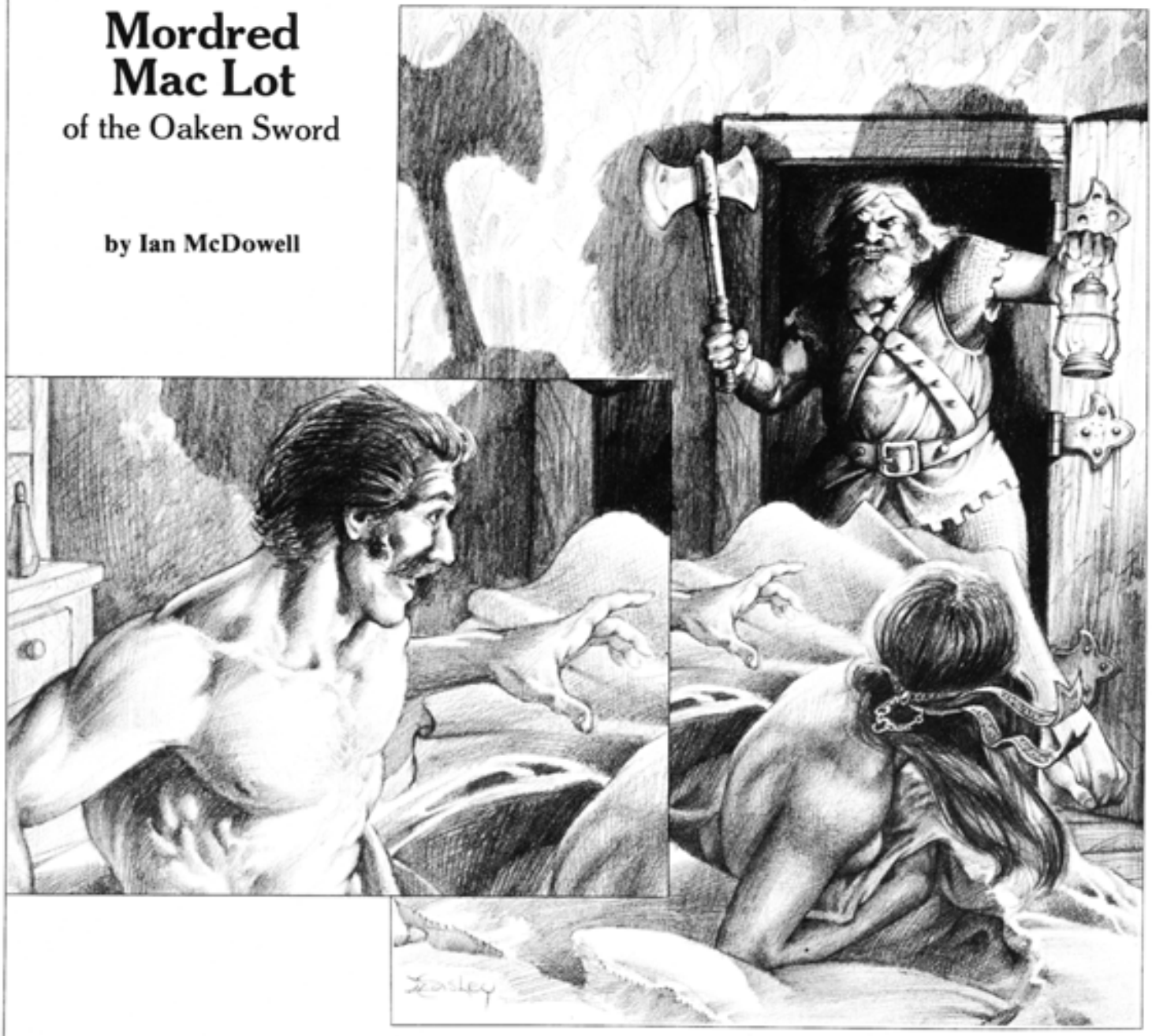
Mordred Mac Lot
of the Oaken Sword

by Ian McDowell

Editor's note: *We asked Ian McDowell, author of "The Oaken Sword" in this issue, to elaborate a bit on the background of Mordred Mac Lot and the novel he's writing from which the story is taken. He not only did that, he also told us some about himself: "I have no distinguishing scars. When I was younger I collected reptiles, having over 40 different species in my room at one time. The boa constrictors were the friendliest. I'm one of the dreaded secular humanists, but unlike others of my ilk, who tend to be pinko liberals, my political persuasions are Royalist. As to the question of why I write about Mordred: I have no idea. Inspiration for the character came a few summers ago while playing Mordred in a local dinner theatre, but I've fiddled with the character for a number of years."*

ARTHURIAN BRITAIN

The setting for my stories is neither the Mallorian mishmash of the 12th through 15th centuries used by T.H. White nor the accurately-described Celtic Britain of historical novelists like Rosemary Sutcliffe and fantasists like David Drake and Parke Godwin.



Instead, it's a deliberately anachronistic hodgepodge in which the roughhewn feudalism of the 11th century is overlaid on the Welsh customs and society of the 5th century. Perhaps in this regard it is similar to the rococo Dark Ages of Avram Davidson. Arthur and his knights are Celtic Britons, not transplanted Normans, yet they dress in chain mail (but not armor plate), hold tournaments, and live in post-Conquest style stone castles.

There are references to 5th century placenames like Powys. The Saxons are invading, and the *Scotti* Irish have only recently settled in the Pictish wilderness north of Hadrian's Wall, yet Orkney is a Scot dominion and the land across the Channel is clearly France and not Frank-infested Gaul. Rome has only recently fallen and Byzantium is on the rise, yet feudal institutions are well-established. Confusing isn't it?

MORDRED (the character)

Mordred is in his mid-twenties. He's slightly below medium height, lean and wiry, and has black hair and green eyes. He has a mustache. He seldom, if ever, stoops to rape and he fights extremely well when his back is to the wall, but other than that he has few of the knightly virtues.

He was born the son of King Lot and Queen Morgawse, the sovereign rulers of Orkney. Whether because Lot suspected that Mordred wasn't his son, or because he's a sour and nasty man, the King always treated Mordred very badly. Morgawse, on the other hand, loved her son well enough in her absent-minded way. The Queen was a formidable sorceress, though not nearly the equal of her sister Morgan Le Fay, and Mordred couldn't help but pick up some of the rudiments of her art. However, he never showed much real interest in it, simply accepting it as a motherly hobby the same way he accepted her knitting.

Mordred idolized his "Uncle" Arthur. Arthur, a Christian somewhat embarassed of his pagan sister, but fond of her children, was shocked when he discovered that Mordred was his son as well as his nephew. He had once slept with Morgawse without knowing that she was his sister (for he did not yet know that he was Uther the High King's son), or even that she was the Queen of Orkney (admiring the handsome young cavalry commander present at Uther's Yuletide feast, Morgawse had gone to his tent in the guise of a servant girl). Later, when he discovered his heritage, Arthur had not recognized his newly-found sister as being the woman he'd spent a night with many years before.

When Arthur finds out about Mordred's incestuous origin, he rejects the boy in horror and this rejection is a great blow to Mordred. Some time later, diplomatic necessities force Arthur to accept Mordred as a knight of his court, but he shows him little affection. Mordred spends his first few years trying to gain Arthur's respect and acceptance, but with growing cynicism, he gives it up as a lost cause.

Mordred has some affection for his Aunt Morgan who is both human and a Queen of the Otherworld. Morgan is colder and more level-headed than her sister and infinitely more powerful. She is not a woman to cross.

Mordred usually despises quests but he eventually undertakes one of his own free will. This quest is the slaying of the giant Cado, who defeated and humiliated Arthur when Mordred was a boy. But after Mordred has brought Cado's head back to his King, he discovers that even this act does not win him Arthur's parental love and Mordred says to hell with trying to be a dutiful son. . . .

MORDRED (the novel)

Part One: Son of the Morning

In which I, Mordred Mac Lot, Crown Prince of Orkney, am first introduced to the delighted reader. In this section I'm naught but a naive fourteen-year-old, having not yet acquired my famed charm and *savoir-faire*. My nominal da, King Lot of Orkney, is a thorny old bugger with the face of a hungry codfish and all the warmth of a tax collector, and it's really no surprise that my filial affection ends up being placed upon my Uncle Artorius, also known as Arthur ab Uther, the Pendragon, or *Imperator Britanniarium*, which is fancy talk for High King of all the Brits.

At Lot's request, Arthur comes to Orkney to battle with Cado, a particularly fearsome giant who has the charming habit of weaving the scalp hairs of his victim's severed heads into his filthy beard, so that he actually wears a tangled mass of mummified skulls as his only garment. Before the battle takes place, both Arthur and I are rather surprised to discover that I'm his son as well as his nephew; Queen Morgawse having once been tactless enough to seduce her own brother. When he loses the fight with Cado, Arthur blames this failure upon his newly revealed "sin" (his word, not mine). In the process, he rejects me and dashes my hopes of acquiring a new and better father.

Part Two: The Black Nunnery

Sick of Mum's apron strings and Lot's snide distaste for my person, I set off to seek my fame and fortune (or whatever) on the British mainland. A rather nasty interlude in a cursed abbey convinces me that I'd be best off in the comfort and comparative safety of Arthur's court at Caerleon.

Part Three: Chichevache

I become a Knight of the Round Table, but it's not what it's cracked up to be. Taking refuge from boredom in strong drink, I make a slight scene at the Yuletide Feast. So, in order to redeem my good name (as if I had one), I'm obliged to undertake a bloody quest. I hate quests. Against all expectations, including my own, I manage to rescue the absolutely stunning Lady Rhiannon from the fearsome monster Chichevache, who eats nothing but the flesh of "good and faithful wives."

Part Four: The Oaken Sword

Rhiannon is a nice piece. Unfortunately she's married to a hulking lout of a half-Saxon, the type of fellow who squeezes bears for his morning exercise. Surprised by him in his Lady's boudoir, I make an undignified escape via the castle privy. He catches up with me, however, and on a deserted moor, I end up killing him in self-defense. But the worst is yet to come: I find that I've made my stand on a Faery mound, and the inhabitants thereof are slightly peeved. In return for sparing my life, they force me to search the haunted forests of Lyonesse for a legendary oaken sword, a magical weapon that rests in a hidden pre-Druidic temple. I hate quests.

Part Five: Helga

Temporarily exiled for murdering Rhiannon's husband, I encounter a Saxon sorceress who is fleeing from an abnormally persistent and not quite human would-be suitor. All in all, it's a bloody mess, but for once I came out smelling like a rose.

Part Six: Cado

My period of exile ends, and I decide to make one last attempt at winning Arthur's approval. Cado, the giant who defeated Arthur when I was a boy, is still at large in the Pictish Wilderness. The creature is the result of a union between the wife of a commander of one of the last Gallic legions and the infamous giant of St. Michael's Mount. After many difficulties, I manage to convince Cado that I share his complex nihilism and wish to join him in his war against human society. Having won his trust, I trick him into a vulnerable position and kill him. Taking his head back to Caerleon, I am mortified to discover that this victory has only deepened the gulf between my true father and myself. ▲

NITIMANDREY
& the cabinetmaker's vision

In the Season of the Warming during the sowing of the fields in the time when Rudatan, Madrivantra, Apsaris, Suryi, and Nitimandrey ruled respectively in Candoria, Brinle, Boshuon, Caspriqua-qui, and Tamor Sachi, there came a man of middle years clad in peasant cloth to the court of King Nitimandrey. This wretch threw himself upon the confessional block and cried out, "Woe unto me, Holy Sire, that whilst in unsure finances I stole twenty coppers from a friend not much better off than myself. For this sin I have been cursed with a nightly Vision and a Voice. O merciful Nitimandrey, I plead of you, sever this unworthy head from its burdened shoulders for my crime. Then might I suffer this nightmare no more!"

Nitimandrey leaned forward from his high throne. He was splendorous in shimmering silks. Upon his gleaming seat of gold and precious stones, he looked to be the personification of the Sun, whose only child he was said to be.

"What Vision and whose Voice," asked Nitimandrey, his curiosity sincere, "has sent you selling your head for twenty coppers?"

There were those of little faith who said the holy light emanating from the King was artificially concocted with a magic powder. But the miserable peasant did not doubt His Majesty's sanctity. He lifted his face to gaze into the brightness of the throne and its tall, revered occupant. Nitimandrey the Great usurped the evil pope, and put an end to the ghastly rites which cardinals performed before spider idols. Tamor Sachi's new ruler replaced the despairing religion of the old reich with promises of paradise. Therefore was the peasant, in his grievous distress, encouraged to seek immediate passage to paradise. Death was preferred over another day of earthly strife and another night with his frightening Vision. The timid wretch wailed to Nitimandrey:

"It was the nether god Arza Bulan, whose worship has been abolished by your own decree. She has shown herself to me in the horrid form of a monstrous spider. She has called me like a fly into iniquitous darkness. On each of the three passing nights since my sin of thievery, my soul has been beckoned to her secret and inimical lair, where her terrible voice rings out these words: 'Behold, heathen! The land you know!' And by the signing of her spidery legs, she provides me the Vision. Each time it is narrated thus: 'I will shake the heavens upon the earth. I will set the armies upon themselves, and brother will slay brother. The wheels will come undone from the char-

Illustrations by Jeff Easley

by Jessica Amanda Salmonson

iots. Mortar will turn to powder between the stones, and all the buildings fall. Beasts will grow ill and bony. There will be eternal drought, the likes of which the world has never known before. No olive, pomegranate, grain, or rye will bless the fields. Plagues will smite any who live beyond the first of an endless sequence of blights. And you alone, heathen, shall be spared in order that one might see the false priests crawl from the rubble of their crumbled Temples of the Sun to cry aloud, *'Save us Arza Bulan! Save us, though we have done thee wrong!'* But I will not hear, for I shall have no ears.'

"I beg of you once more, O benevolent Nitimandrey, free me of these visitations from the demon-god! Send me at once to the promised hereafter of your Father the Sun!"

Nitimandrey rose in a flourish of brilliant robes and descended the Seven Steps to Earth. He laid a sturdy hand upon the head of the bowing, trembling peasant. To the ever warm touch of the Sun's own Son, the peasant ceased his fearful quaking and became tranquil.

The hallowed King asked, "What is your name, loyal subject?"

"Durool. A humble and jobless cabinetmaker without family or worth."

"Know this, Durool," the venerated ruler promulgated, "never again will the dread Vision trouble you. Know more, humble cabinetmaker, that this was no fierce imagining, but a threat against me, from a stricken and vengeful demon. And know you finally that we must step to avert these tragedies shown to you, lest the threat be made true prophesy."

A devout follower, the King's words made Durool's heart pound with burning potency. He inquired in an even tone, no longer the poltroon, "What shall be done, Holy Sire?"

Nitimandrey spoke thoughtfully, one hand still resting on his knelt and pious subject, the other hand held pensively to his chin. "You said the spider demon called you into darkness. Can you tell me more of the nature of this darkness?"

Durool brought down his pallid brow in concentration, and recalled reluctantly, "It was a green night rather than sable, rank and odoriferous. Like the bottom of a deep, damp hole. A chill and foreboding place. An evil haunt, Holy Sire, for a certainty!"

"Beneath the earth," Nitimandrey ascertained. "Many dark and overthrown gods of old have withdrawn into the bowels of the world, there to brood upon their losses. If Arza Bulan plots revenge and destruction against the land, then it is for us to seek her out and plot the destruction of Arza Bulan. Be brave, Durool! Stand tall before your King! We shall walk side by side, hand in hand, as equals you and I . . . into the lair of the cruel spider demon, to do her battle there!"

Durool slowly rose from his knees, stood tall within his rags, as tall as the grandly bedecked Son of the Sun. And he felt the strength of the King flow through the space between them, into the veins of a peasant. He vowed, "Though ill-trained by the sword, I shall walk beside you most proudly, O Holy Sire. To the utmost of my ability shall I aid you to avert the catastrophes of my vision. Truly it would be better to die fighting for the salvation of Tamor Sachi than to surrender my head for a venial crime as first I sought!"

Thus the noblemen and their wives and servants watched from their mansions and were puzzled to see their King ride by in his golden chariot drawn by four blond steeds, heading beyond the orchards and plantations surrounding the palace, with some unknown peasant standing at his side. And so it was the mighty warriors and the heroes-in-residence were left behind with their wine and lovers, while their saintly King fled with naught but one untrained and poorly armed as aide, guard, and companion. And so it was the simple farmers and citizens of various villages along the way watched in awe as their good King passed swiftly by — a mere peasant, in rags like their own, commanding four of the eight reins to a beautiful and inspirational chariot.

Onward went the chariot of gold, gone to seek Arza Bulan in her unholy habitation, Mount Nanada-pe of Six Peaks, in the east of the land over which Nitimandrey then ruled.

Durool was at first sorely afraid of the unnatural speed of the four fine blond steeds. He overcame this fear in a while, knowing that if he feared horses he would surely quake and fail at the sight of the spider-demon. Even unafraid, it remained to his thinking a strange mode of travel; for the chariot's spinning wheels did not squeak and cry, and the steeds did not sweat or grow weary. And Durool wondered if it were the steeds' strength and stamina and the exceedingly fine crafting of well-oiled axles that made the ride so silent. Or was it that all of them were specters, his King and himself included, racing noiselessly over the countryside on a mission of doom?

Night fell. But light emanated from the golden chariot, from the sleek groomed stallions, from the King and even from Durool, lighting the road and way.

Durool looked down at his own hands, which held half the reins of the chariot. He saw that his palms glowed in the darkness,

and he knew assuredly that he had been touched with divinity, chosen as he was to accompany his All Mighty King on a noble quest. The rest of his fear melted away at these thoughts. He considered how his very sword — tarnished and dull as it was — might well be destined to successfully carry out whatever task came near to hand.

Through the night sped the silent chariot and team and drivers. Yellow as the sun they were, swift as the javelin; and before them, beneath the rising moon and upon the jagged horizon, Mount Nanda-pe stood with its double trio of peaks darkly silhouetted against the stars. Each of the multiple summits sprouted from the land like weird growths, or like fingers reaching up from graves, worshipping the darkness.

All the night passed. The horses, all but snorting flame, finally came to an abrupt halt at the base of the grey mountain. Though not large by comparison to the vast ranges in far southern nations, Nanda-pe was yet the highest monument in all Tamor Sachi or nearby land. No trees found root on this soilless mountain of sterile ash and stone, with its rivers and waterfalls of solidified lava. Durool was awed by the sight as he looked up along the shunned mountain. He saw clearly, even from this sharp angle, four of the six peaks against the orange and crimson dawn.

"Nanda-pe provides the dens of six forgotten gods," reminded Nitimandrey. "One to each peak, slumbering while awaiting new life and new worshippers — neither of which shall ever come to them."

Then the ruler removed his flowing cape and wrapped it around the cabinetmaker for a moment. He did not explain why he did this. But while within the cape's warmth Durool felt a surge of energy charge his entire being. He stood speechless and dumbfounded for some while after the King removed the heavy garment and tossed it onto the chariot to leave behind. Freeing the stallions to graze where they might, Nitimandrey then led Durool up into the shadowed highlands.

Until the height of the Sun they climbed, and finally came to an opening into the first cavern. Nitimandrey made prayers in an ancient tongue to his Father the Sun, then blessed Durool. Then both said good-

bye to the light, hello to cavern's night.

Downward they sank into blackness, with their own auras of heavenly illumination to show the way. Cave lizards and foot-long millipedes fled from the glow of the phosphoring passers, for even this dim light was blinding to creatures used to the darkness of eternal night.

The path was slippery and treacherous. The atmosphere hung with the repugnance of decayed fish and vile flotsam such as might be washed onto the shore of a poisonous and pernicious isle in some uncharted sea. Eventually they came to a wide, low chamber where the darkness clung about them like green slime. Durool said of the algal night, "It was a place like this, but not this place."

Then, upon the floor before their feet, two large bulbous eyes rolled open. Despite the beast's camouflaging coloration, Durool could vaguely make out the diamond shape of a whip-tailed Manta Ray. He drew forth his tarnished sword and stepped between the Manta and the King, thinking bravely to sheer off that long tail if the elder sea-god attacked. But Nitimandrey gently moved Durool aside and addressed the Manta politely. It did not move, save blink its huge, moist, ebonite eyes.

"We have come to slay your sister Arza Bulan!" confessed the King. "Since she is not here, we shall leave you to your rest, unless you would first weary us with battle."

The trembling voice of the Manta spoke. "Mariners no longer pray to me, O Nitimandrey, Mortal God. Whales long ago ceased to flee my path in fear and respect. All the beasts of the waters have forsaken my worship. Even the poorest, most superstitious fishermen neglect to have their sacrifices to the stormy seas which were once mine to rule. Gone are the aeons during which I might have feasted on your flesh, leaving not so much as to appease the lowest plankton. Now I desire only to be left to my unpeaceful self-indulgence, so that I might ruminate over past and better millenia. Begone from my refuge! Slay my sister if you can, and if that be your aspiration!"

Durool sheathed his short, blunt sword. The two large, round eyes closed and sank into the head of the Manta. Durool hurried after the departing King in much relief. They came again to the light of the Sun, and Nitimandrey thanked his Father for the safe passage through the first of a possible six fantastic trials.

Down the slope they descended, then up the next, and came to a difficult jut. Durool almost fell to his death, but for the strong hand of the King. Once again Nitimandrey litanied his ritualistic incantations, which made no sense to the cabinetmaker, and afterward blessed Durool. They descended not for the last time into stone-enclosed black night.

Always there was the dim golden glow emanating from themselves, to help them keep their way. Durool noted he cast no shadow. For a moment his breath quickened, as he wondered if he had died somewhere along the way; but then he realized he was his own light source and thus could not be expected to cast his own shadow.

Through forests of stone formations they ventured phantasmagorically, until again they came upon the yawning entrance of a huge chamber. It was rank with the odor of spoiled jungle compost.

"It was a place much like this," said Durool, surveying the navy darkness. "But it was not this place."

At their feet was a small, round hole, perhaps bored originally by some rock-eating worm. From this hole there seeped a vapor that gathered into a pulsating cloud and slowly molded itself into the tenuous form of a monstrous ape. Durool again withdrew his sword and stepped protectively between the King and the hunched, long-armed demon towering over them. The cabinetmaker had bolstered himself for bravery's sake, although any action would not be of much benefit, there being no chance of his sword rending gas. He felt morally bound to put forth all effort. But no futile action was necessitated, for again Nitimandrey stepped forward to speak.

"O vaporous ape, we seek your spider sister to slay. We would leave you to your restless slumber, if you would leave us to our task."

The flat-faced cloud of semi-human appearance answered coldly, "Not always was I of such insubstantial form. Once I might have crushed you in my iron thews. But the jungle folk no longer spill the blood of their first-born upon now vine-encrusted altars. No longer do they tie their finest virgins in the shrines where once I was held supreme. Generation by generation, I lose more and more of my density. No longer can I lift so much as a pebble, for it passes through my hands. It is sad for me but good for you that I cannot hamper you along your chosen path."

So once again they trod upward to the light of day. The Sun was not far from setting. Nitimandrey seemed reluctant to enter into the third peak when they came to its cavern at nightfall. But he made his prayers to the last feeble rays reflected on the bottom of clouds, and blessed Durool for the third time that day. They sank again into the blackness like stones into the sea, their own glowing flesh and garb still lighting the way.

It was a larger cavern, this, taking them deeper than the previous two. They coughed and gagged on the thick, rancid, metallic air. They followed a swift underground stream through a cold, cold tunnel, hearing unexplained splashes now and then, but seeing not one aquatic or amphibious being along the route. At length the water fell further underground, and the tunnel bent another way. There they came into a large chamber apparently hewn from solid stone, for the room was perfectly square. The walls, ceiling and floor were polished smooth. The room was empty but for a single huge rock too large to have been removed through the small entrance.

"Aye," Durool began, "it was a place like this. Very much like this. Yet I am uncertain that this is the precise place." He pondered a moment, looking the walls up and down, then decided, "No, these walls seem cut and polished, while the place of my vision was a naturally existing chamber. This is not the place."

The boulder in the chamber's center seemed to twist gratingly upon the floor, causing the room to echo and rumble to a sound much like an earthquake. Durool boldly drew his sword, even though it was folly to wield bronze against stone.

Fortunately, as before, any such match was rendered unnecessary, for Nitimandrey clearly proclaimed, "O unearthly elemental: we have come to slay your spider sister. If you would make quakes and bring down the walls, we would be woefully hindered. Yet might our swords chip your surface enough to win us a portion of vengeance. Would you cause these things to happen, or will you rather be left to your stony slumber?"

The boulder spoke in a tiny, hoarse whisper, a voice that seemed to originate from nowhere and everywhere at once. "I command the elements no longer. I am now a simple boulder like any other." Then the rock was silent, as stones must be, and the two men made the long journey upward to a starlit sky. Durool spoke of his hunger, but the King pointed out that the mountain sides were barren, and the subject was dropped. They had been long without sleep, and Nitimandrey was less bold wihout the Sun awake. So, they camped on the ledge before the cavern mouth, and awoke with the Sun to resume their travel.

Up to the fourth gaping black maw they ascended. After the usual ritual, the King led the commoner down into the mountain hole. This was a small peak with small winding passages within. The pair were forced on several occasions to crawl on hands and knees, and even upon their bellies. Durool

portered the impression that his luminous self and his glowing holy companion were beginning to dim somewhat, as though the light were beginning to weaken or wear off or burn out. But he said nothing of such troubling thoughts, hoping it was only his imagination. He crawled on, soon to forget this particular fear in exchange for newer ones.

They crawled out of the narrow passage into a room of small proportions, barely high enough to allow standing. "No, no," Durool asserted firmly, without hesitation. "This is far too dry and clean a place. We must go on to the next."

But before they could leave, a pinprick of red light appeared starlike in the middle of the small chamber, hovering in the dark. It grew and grew as the duo watched, until it had reached medium proportions, floating as a balloon of crimson light. Durool brought sword in hand, thinking he would burst the sphere like a soap bubble if it proved dangerous, or if it expanded to a size that might press them to the wall. Before Nitimandrey could stop him, Durool had poked the sphere just as it ceased enlarging. Bright red sparks flung from it, sending Durool smashing against the wall as though smitten by a great hand.

The ruddy, levitated object spoke in a deep voice that might have come up from a bottomless well, saying nothing more than, "Leave my tomb!" Then, slowly, the sphere began to shrink back whence it came, reducing itself to a merest droplet of blood suspended in space. Then even this was gone.

Durool still ached from the shock received by contact with the sphere. Staring at the tip of his sword, which had been melted or vaporized or otherwise shorn away, he queried, "What sort of demon was it?"

Even the all-wise King did not know. He shook his head, saying, "All gods are eventually forgotten, some more completely than others. But death for them is hard, and they linger on; and it is well for us that they do, for the death of gods and demons is not taken lightly by the fabric of the universe."

Soon they had crawled up from the small cavern and climbed down the fourth peak and up the fifth. This was the highest peak of the six; it took up the greater portion of the day reaching an entrance situated very near the summit. From that opening emitted the foulest of reeks: ammonia and excreta mixed liberally with mold and rotted, gangrenous flesh. After making an especially long prayer to the low Sun, and blessing Durool to the point of embarrassment, they pushed into the wall of stink.

They descended an exceptionally steep grade, slipping and stumbling and sliding down on their rumps in slime and bat droppings. In no other cavern had the flying mammals been so common as here. Eyes blinked from the ceiling's darkness, watching the passers below. Hanging like odd ornaments, the little creatures chittered nervously among themselves, an occasional bold specimen dropping down more closely to inspect the intruders. Durool would swat at them when they swooped. More than once he slid and fell in excreta thick at his feet, while swinging his arms at the false-birds of fur and leather. The King was more surefooted, sliding rarely, ignoring the bats altogether. He led on.

The soft golden glow of his leader's cloak was somewhat reassuring in the dark; yet Durool could not help but note how the godly glow of Nitimandrey, and the same incandescence borrowed for himself, had faded still more from earlier in their venturing. Durool feared that each peak's cavern and the antiquated gods within had, one by one, leeched the priestly King of more of his power. It was a sour possibility and Durool wished the thought would stop recurring.

"Stop," spoke Nitimandrey, raising his dimly fluorescent arm and sleeve.

Durool stopped at his side, seeing the black hole they had come upon.

"Is there no way around it?"

Nitimandrey reached into his shirt of silk and removed a gold coin from an inner pocket — a coin such as a poor cabinetmaker would seldom see in a lifetime. He threw it down, as though it were but a devalued copper, into the pit. The coin fell a short ways, clinking and rattling upon stone. It lay only a few arm-lengths below, glowing like a coal in the night.

"Darkness fools the eye," whispered Nitimandrey. "It is but a small depression."

After the King leapt down, Durool followed suit. They walked to the opposite wall of the hole, and Durool gave the King a foothold up. The King pulled his peasant follower up, and they pressed on.

Always the inimical bats chittered and fluttered. Their eyes gleamed from above. Though the King seemed oblivious to their presence, they were a source of concern to Durool. He asked, "Your Holiness, are these not unordinary bats?"

Nitimandrey did not turn his head from his course, but asked, "By what do you mean?"

"I mean they are too small for ordinary bats. Have you ever heard the description of a certain bloodletting tropical bat?"

"There are many varieties of bat, my fretful companion. The blood drinkers need a warmer clime than Tamor Sachi can offer."

For awhile this answer satisfied Durool and dispelled his apprehension. But the tiny eyes from the heights stared so steadfastly with malevolence that Durool's imaginings budded anew. Wiping moisture from his furrowed brow, he asked, "Sire, is this cavern not very warm from volcanic activity?"

"It is stifling and rank," the King allowed.

"Then perhaps this colony of bats lives in these warm caverns and no others because they are from a warmer clime!"

Nitimandrey stopped. He turned to face the logician. He studied Durool for a moment, pensive, then looked up at the ceilingful of watchful, miniscule embers. He seemed to really see them for the first time.

"You may not be wrong after all," spoke Nitimandrey. "Perhaps these are the last worshippers of whatever forgotten god dwells here, come with him from some distant land to this final stronghold. They may await only their god's cue, to leap upon us in a flurry of wings, to suck out all our blood. Are you afraid to go on?"

"I have not once stopped being afraid," was the peasant's candid reply. "But more important than my fear is my conviction that the sixth and final peak is the one we seek. In my vision, the cavern was foul, but not so foul as this. Nor were the floors so slimy. And the place of my dream was definitely cold, not warm as in here. I have seen more abominations these two days than most see in lifetimes. I wish to see only one more, not two, and that Arza Bulan."

The King nodded favorably to these points. He said, "Then I follow you, Durool. We go back in haste."

So told, Durool turned around and scrabbled up the slippery slopes, feeling piercing eyes upon him. He dared not look up to where the red eyes blinked like a million lake-hued stars, for the sight would surely have sapped him of the strength to carry on.

They came eventually to the shallow hole and jumped into it, scurrying to the other side where Durool retrieved the golden coin for his own before climbing out. Then, before them, they saw two vast cavern corridors where before there had been only one.

"Sorcery!" whispered Durool, cursing.

"I think not, cabinetmaker," reassured Nitimandrey. "The angle of this fork is such that, coming down, we could not have seen the second passage heading back."

"But which one did we come through?"

"You are now leading," Nitimandrey reminded.

Encouraged by this expression of faith in one of humble pretensions, Durool unhesitatingly tossed the King's gold piece into the air and caught it on his wrist. Abiding by the first decision, he started up the left-hand

tunnel. It was a winding, steep path and Durool quickly suspected he had chosen wrong, for the way had twisted less often coming down. But Nitimandrey said it was an illusion because it was more toilsome climbing upward. And for as long as his King had faith, Durool tried also to believe in himself and his decision.

A deep, rumbling growl rolled through the corridor, chasing up from the depths. The bats were set to excited chatter and frantic flight. The spectral couple commenced flailing their arms at the sudden flapping storm of tiny mammalians. Though Durool had at first thought the volcanic tremor in the mountain's bowels had merely frightened the bats into their frenzied activity, both he and Nitimandrey soon admitted that the rumble had been no tremor but the voice of a demon ordering the fiends into action.

The King's jeweled blade was removed from its equally gaudy scabbard for the first time on their mission. It swung left and right in shining figure eights. Durool's tarnished and blunted shortsword carved as rapidly. Both blades swatted and sliced the diminutive attackers from the air around. But the foe was as thick as soup and undefeatable. Both men were bitten on arms, necks and faces — small razored bites which were too clean to sting, but which bled all the better. Covering their faces and still swinging their variant swords, they forced their way through the turmoil of leather and fur all around.

"We have come the wrong way!" Durool cried over the storm of wings. "We must go back!"

"Go on! Go on!" the King insisted, swinging his jeweled sword to clear a path, forcing Durool to continue climbing else he be cleared from the path along with the needle-toothed flurry.

Durool fell, whimpered over the multitude of teeth on his back, stood, and continued up the grade. "It is the wrong way!" he persisted, but the King prodded him on.

Then, ahead and slightly above, a light shone. It was the sky above the western-setting Sun! Bloodied and battered under the weight of multitudinous wings and teeth, the two men burst from the rank, warm mountain cellars, into the cool sunset. The tropical bats, chilled even at the midday, could by no means venture into impending night. They remained inside their god's warm lair.

Durool lay flat on his chest, panting. When he rose up on two arms, he saw his King sitting cross-legged on the very ledge of the sheer cliff. Nitimandrey faced the setting Sun, either sleeping, meditating, praying or all three. The peasant crawled toward his unlikely peer, only slightly amazed that the Son of the Sun should be bleeding like a common mortal. He stared, unspeaking, until Nitimandrey, some minutes later, opened his eyes and smiled at his ragged companion as though they had just met after a long separation.

"You were conferring with the Sun?" Durool asked in awe, and receiving no answer, he asked another question: "How were you sure I had chosen the right way?"

The King looked to the horizon as the first evening star winked. He answered, "Would the rumbling god far below have set his bats upon us if we were headed elsewhere than to freedom?"

Durool considered that for a moment, then began to laugh over his own stupidity. His laughter grew slightly hysterical, and then he thought himself surely mad to find mirth at such an occasion. But Nitimandrey joined the laughter with equal heartiness, proving madness divine.

They slept on that ledge. When Durool awoke it was dawn. Nitimandrey had already risen and was coming down from the very top of the peak's summit with eagle eggs of largish size. Finding Durool awake, the industrious early riser offered him one of the pilfered eggs and said, "We must end our fast. We will need strength for the final peak and that which waits within."

Durool tapped a hole in each end of the huge egg with a sharp stone, and greedily sucked out the contents, as did his Majesty. There was an absurdity about the King of Tamor Sachi feasting on a raw, partially developed egg — rather than banqueting in the palace dining hall . . . just as there was absurdity in a King undertaking an important mission with no aid but one subservient cabinetmaker. There were no understanding gods or kings and less understanding god-kings; and Durool could only try to keep faith, try to believe that Nitimandrey knew it to be preordained that only at the side of the purveyor of the Vision of Doom would this quest meet with success.

Indeed it was imperative that Durool keep such faith and not doubt the divinity of his comrade. For like the beings inhabiting Nanda-pe of Six Peaks, without believers Nitimandrey would cease to be a god and would no longer wield the power of the Sun. Durool must not think how death had only by fortune been averted the night before. He dared not consider that Nitimandrey was a mere man, or say to himself that the holy light which had thus far seen them through darkness was nothing more than a magician's trick done with some powder perhaps sprinkled on the inside of the golden cape Nitimandrey had for an instant let him wear.

It was not so hard to keep his faith. For even while feasting from an egg shell, Nitimandrey's beautiful, angelic profile remained that of a god's incarnation.

There was no more time allotted Durool to question the condition and meaning of his predicament. For the pauper's meal was ended. The abandonment of the fifth peak for the final one was underway.

Their destination was upon them. Both men wondered if success were upon them also. The pair stood before the last cavern, and Durool listened to Nitimandrey's poetic prayer. Then, for the sixth time blessed, Durool went side by side with the King into the familiar darkness of green satin night.

"This is the place!" Durool exclaimed lowly, even before they came into any chamber. He quaked from head to heel, but braced himself boldly.

"Fear not death; fear not destiny," the King litanied.

They had hardly gone any distance before entering abruptly into a vast stalactite-hung, cathedral-like chamber. Dimly visible by the now dreadfully indistinct glow of holy light, they saw the horrid thing. At the far, far end of the magnificent room a natural stone formation had grown, strangely colored, layered roughly into a shape like a half-melted throne. In the gigantic throne rested

an arachnid of the proper proportions to fill the seat.

The usurper and the heathen faced Arza Bulan in her fortress. But the spider did not move. She stood on all eights. Her five tiny eyes were closed. Sabered mandibles did not clack. She was as still as a bronze and iron spider statue.

Durool voiced his hope that Arza Bulan had died from lack of sacrifices, and stood tall only because of the armor of her indestructible exoskeleton. But Nitimandrey corrected this notion, saying that fortune was indeed with them, for Arza Bulan was deep in meditation. She was therefore vulnerable to attack. "On each side of Arza Bulan's head," Nitimandrey further explained, "are her hearing organs. The thin membranous coverings are the Great Spider's only weak spots. If we can run our swords through each of her tympanums, we may find her brain and succeed in our task. But beware, Durool, and remember that I told you the death of demons means the unleashing of pent-up powers. We may need to be swift in our death blows, and swifter in our escape, lest the ceilings fall upon our heads or molten rock vomit up from the earth's bowels!"

Nitimandrey motioned Durool to the left, while himself circling to the right. They aligned themselves against the spider demon from two sides. If the quiet monster were feigning meditation, it might lunge at any moment and crush either the King or the peasant in the wicked mandibles. But the other would survive long enough to puncture the tympanic membrane and pierce the spider's brain. Durool held his tarnished sword with the melted tip at ready, and the King did likewise with his jeweled blade.

But Durool stopped his progression with a terrible realization. His feet froze to the spot. Remembering the vision he had been given, remembering what the voice of Arza Bulan had warned, Durool had a fearful revelation. He could approach no closer to the throne or to the spider.

"Do you fall to fear, cabinetmaker?" the King asked urgently, seeing the sweat and troubled expression on his stalled confederate's face.

"O Holy Sire!" Durool began, his whisper harsh. "We cannot put our swords into this creature's head!"

"We can try. We must try!" vowed the King. "Do not fail me now, my friend! Salvation is in our hands! Death to Arza Bulan! Peace for Tamor Sachi!" Nitimandrey's tone was righteous. Durool had not seen the obsession before.

The peasant shook his head, and explained insistently, "You misunderstand. In my vision Arza Bulan said that only I shall live to see the destruction she intends. This being so, I need not fear death. What I fear is more profound! Look at her standing there, pretending not to see us or hear us. She could do her meditating from a web, safe upon the ceiling. So why sit here so vulnerable? It is a trick, Sire! She waits for you and I to approach, but she will not try to stop us from running our swords into her ears! She will not stop us, for it will not make her die!"

"Why do you believe this?" asked Nitimandrey, trying to watch both spider and peasant at the same time.

"Because she has told me the priests will crawl from the rubble of their Temples to the Sun, crying out: 'Save us, Arza Bulan, save us!' And she will not hear them, *for she will have no ears!*" Saying this, Durool threw down his sword and fell weeping upon his face. He barely moved. His whimpering was the only sound in the chamber.

Though inestimably disappointed in this last-minute return to cowardice, Nitimandrey was not angry. Nitimandrey was all-forgiving. And, though alone his success was less likely, he would continue to attend his fight against evil. Undaunted, the King rushed toward the dormant spider-demon, aiming the jeweled blade at the window-like ear which led to the brain.

But Nitimandrey stopped in mid-stride. He did not stop because of a theory concocted by Durool's fright. He stopped because of a sound he heard: a distant, tiny cackling, as of a witch's laughter.

That laughter was ancient and mocking, but it instantly ceased. Nitimandrey stood, uncertain that he had truly heard it. He cocked his head and looked beneath the belly of the upright gold-black spider. There he spied an intricate web of miniscule proportions, woven from one throne arm to the other. In the center of the web was a tiny speck of a spider, weaving idly.

The illusion was uncovered. The image of Arza Bulan faded into nothingness, leaving only one deceptive little spider.

Studded sword sheathed, Nitimandrey went compassionately to Durool's side and helped him stand. Durool still wept, though less from fear.than shame. When he saw the spider-god gone from her throne, he asked, "You have succeeded, Holy Sire? Oh, I am cowardly! I knew from the onset that I would prove unworthy as your company!"

Nitimandrey smiled a wry smile and shrugged his shoulders, as a warrior might do after laying siege to an empty castle. "I have done nothing, for we were both duped! Arza Bulan is no more! Now shrunken and shrivelled and reduced to the height and labor of any common garden pest, she sits on her throne weaving fly-traps. Doubtlessly the last of her strength was used to send her wishful dreams to you!"

For this irony, Nitimandrey laughed.

Durool rubbed his tear-swollen eyes and peered at the octagonal tapestry woven on the cavern throne. His expression was one of concern. Perhaps it was true that a mere spider could manage to invade the sleep of a guilt-ridden, cowardly peasant. But by what power was Nitimandrey fooled? And why would a harmless spider lure her gravest foe into this lair?

"Sire, are there not spiders small and inconsequential in the world, with no worshippers or sacrifices, with yet the power to slay with venomous bites?"

"That there are," allowed the King with a nod.

"Then we do well to flee this place, Sire," said the peasant, swallowing hard, "for the spider no longer rests upon that web."

Startled, Nitimandrey gazed down where the spider had been. All he saw was an empty web. And — was it possible — from the corner of his eye he saw a slight and tiny shadow race across the cavern's rough floor.

Suddenly the King-priest cried out in alarm and swatted at his leg. He raised his hand to his eyes and saw it smeared with black and yellow, the green of the spider's blood, the red of his own. Falling to his knees, he looked dumbly into the face of his companion, Durool, and whispered his last word — "Father."

"Sire!" cried the peasant. The cry pierced the air. When Durool saw his King, the messenger of the Sun, twitching and writhing horridly, he went momentarily mad. He fled the chamber screaming, only to stop cold at the cavern's mouth, startled by the morning sunlight.

Great powers were unleashed, Nitimandrey had said, at the death of a demon or a god. And this day, one of each had died. Nitimandrey and Arza Bulan had met and, like two equal but opposing forces, cancelled each other out. And Arza Bulan had directed, through one lowly cabinetmaker, the purpose of these unleashed forces. Beyond, upon the horizon, dust was rising, and smoke, and the cries of Tamor Sachi's anguished citizens. It was far away, but Durool knew well the sound and the sight, for he had heard it in his dream.

Calmly, he started down from Nandape, to begin his life-long duty as Witness and sole survivor - to trek from border to border and back again, until the day a lonely and empty cabinetmaker died of age and sorrow in the ruins of a nation that once danced in the Sun; a nation that had neglected to appease a spider. ▲

DAWN OF THE DEAD

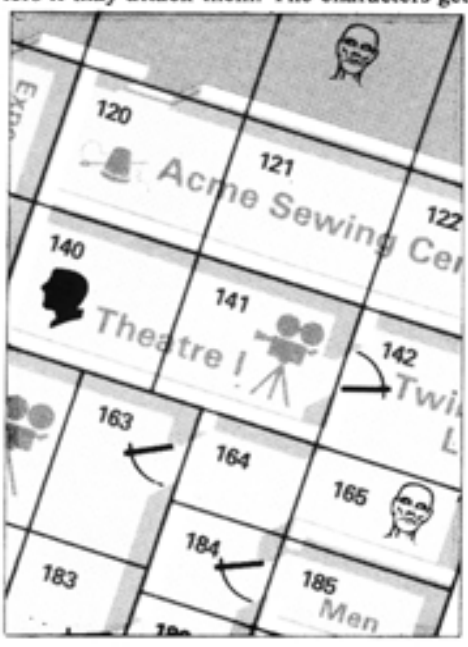
A rules addition makes the game more like the film.

by Edward Bever

In George Romero's gruesome film *Dawn of the Dead*, two soldiers (Roger and Peter), a TV personality named Steve, and his girlfriend Fran flee the collapse of society before a nightmarish onslaught by the undead - live cadavers that hunger for warm human flesh. The *Dawn of the Dead*™ game recreates in simplified form the protagonists struggle to create a sanctuary for themselves in a shopping mall. They begin the game dispersed among the shops at one end of the building, and must close each of the four main doors, seize weapons in the sports store, and destroy all remaining zombies. The undead oppose them by trying to kill or infect either all three men, or Fran and any one man. The zombies heavily outnumber the heroes, but the living are both faster, and with their guns, they are more powerful than the ghouls, so the game is a classic confrontation between quality and quantity.

The simulation is fairly simple, basically a beer and pretzels game. Each turn consists of a human player-turn and a zombie player-turn. The human may move any one group of characters up to the movement allowance of the slowest character in the group, blasting away at the zombies as they go. Movement points are never modified by terrain; instead the sizes of the squares superimposed on the mall's floorplan vary according to their contents. Characters shoot by rolling one, two, or three dice (depending on the weapons mix in the group), modifying the result by the range and the effects of intervening obstacles, and then comparing the result with the target zombie's strength. The number is printed on the back of the zombie counter and is only revealed at the moment of combat. The primary danger the characters face while running and shooting is that they may panic or freeze up when shooting a zombie at close quarters. Another character can usually save a panicked and confused comrade, but not without risk to both.

The zombie player-turn is much more structured. The player begins by rolling a die to see if any zombies go berserk, which makes them faster and more powerful. Next the zombie player moves any zombies that have observed character activity, plus a number of additional ones determined by a die roll. If a zombie ends up in a square containg characters it may attack them. The characters get one chance to defend themselves, but if they do not destroy the attacking zombie, they can be stunned, killed, or infected by it. Infected humans are reduced in strength, and may in subsequent turns become super zombies, which are faster, more intelligent, and more difficult to destroy. At the end of each turn a die roll directs additional zombies to enter the mall through unlocked main doors.



The zombies' activities are so highly structured that a player may not really be necessary. Provision is made in the rules for solitaire play which governs zombie movement and attack, and for multi-player games in which each player controls one or more characters. The main differences between the basic and solitaire versions are the rules covering free zombie movement and hidden zombies. In the basic game, the zombie player determines which zombies move where during free movement. This player also gets to hide, or secretly record the location of five zombies before play starts, placing their counters on the board only when the players blunder into them. In the solitaire version, "free" zombie movement is regulated by a fixed set of priorities, and hidden zombies are generated each turn by a roll of the dice.

For beginning players, the game successfully recreates the tense and chaotic conflict presented in the movie. As players gain experience, however, they will find the humans tend to have a decided advantage. In both the film and the game, the main source of danger to the humans is their own fear, excitement, and confusion; consequently they may make dumb decisions. Though the rules governing panic recreate this vulnerability when the living battle the dead at close quarters, an expe-

rienced human player can avoid many such situations by proceeding with systematic caution. The characters' intitial dispersion and the everpresent danger of ambush by hidden zombies mean that these moments of vulnerability cannot be totally avoided, but the human player can reduce them, and hence also reduce to a bare minimum the zombies' chances for victory.

Several modifications can be made to the game that not only restructure its balance, but also make it more faithful to the movie. One easy modification allows super zombies to open wooden doors (as Steve's corpse does in the film's final scene), and another modification is to change Fran's and Steve's panic ratings. In the movie she proves to be made of tougher stuff than at first appearance; his unreliabilty becomes a constant source of problems for the group. So, it seems more accurate, as well as more challenging, to assign Steve the higher panic level of 3, and Fran the lower level of 2. A third revision that both reflects events in the movie and complicates the humans' problems is to recreate Steve's tendency to ignore group plans and strike out on his own. This revision requires the following additional section of rules.

The zombies outnumber the heroes, but the living are faster and more powerful. It is a classic confrontation between quality and quantity.

[16.0] Impulsive Human Movement

GENERAL RULE:

In the movie, when the four protagonists first enter the mall, Roger and Peter leave Fran and Steve in a secure room and go exploring. Almost as soon as they are gone, Steve takes off on his own, and nearly gets himself killed by a zombie lurking in a boiler room. Roger, too, is a headstrong man, and not every woman would wait as patiently as Fran does. Only Peter, the group's *de facto* leader, seems fully in control of himself. The following rules simulate Steve's (as well as the others') potential impulsiveness.

PROCEDURE:

This rule should be used in conjunction with the revised panic levels described above. At the end of each Human Player-Turn, the human player must check for impulsive movement. Peter never moves impulsively, nor do any characters stacked with him. Any other character alone in a square must be checked. Roll two dice, and if the result is less than or equal to his panic level, the character moves impulsively. If several characters are stacked together, the *dominant* member of the group is checked in the same way. Depending on the result of this check, each other character in the group either need not be checked at all, or is checked by rolling only one die (see 16.1).

If one or more characters are to move impulsively, the zombie player may immediately move them up to their full movement allowance, subject to the normal rules of movement and the following special rules. These are rules suggestions; players may be able to improve on them as the rules are incorporated into the game.

[16.1] **The presence and actions of other characters affects the likelihood that a character will move impulsively.**

Any stack of characters will have a dominant character. Peter dominates any characters stacked with him, and they are never subject to Impulsive Movement. Roger dominates both Steve and Fran, and Steve dominates Fran. If the dominant character does not move impulsively, other characters in the stack will not either. If the dominant character does move impulsively, check for each other character by rolling one die. If the result is equal to or less than the character's Panic Level, that character also moves impulsively.

[16.2] **If more than one character in a stack is to move impulsively, they must be moved together, as described in rule 5.2.**

Otherwise, impulsive characters move alone.

[16.3] **Whenever a character moves adjacent to a visible zombie, the zombie player rolls one die to determine if the character shoots at the zombie.**

If the die roll is less than or equal to the character's Fire Rate, the character fires once. If he fires, the human player may choose to have him fire again before moving on, up to the limit of his Fire Rate. Once a character has expended his fire allowance, he may not fire again during Impulsive Movement. If the character does not or cannot fire, he must move immediately away from the zombie to which he is adjacent.

[16.4] **A character moving impulsively may attempt to enter a square containing a visible zombie only if he has shot at it at least once and he has enough Movement Points remaining to exit the zombie's square and move the distance specified in rule 16.6.**

[16.5] **A character moving impulsively may be moved into a square containing a hidden zombie.**

If he has sufficient Movement Points to move out of the square and satisfy rule 16.6, he will do so. If he has any shots remaining, refer to rule 16.3 to determine if the character shoots before leaving the square. If he cannot leave the square and satisfy rule 16.6, he automatically fires all remaining shots.

[16.6] **A character moving impulsively may not be moved in such a way that he ends his movement within one Movement Point of a normal zombie, two of a berserk zombie, or three of a super zombie.**

[16.7] **If a character is moving impulsively and moves within sight of Peter, his Impulsive Movement automatically ceases.**

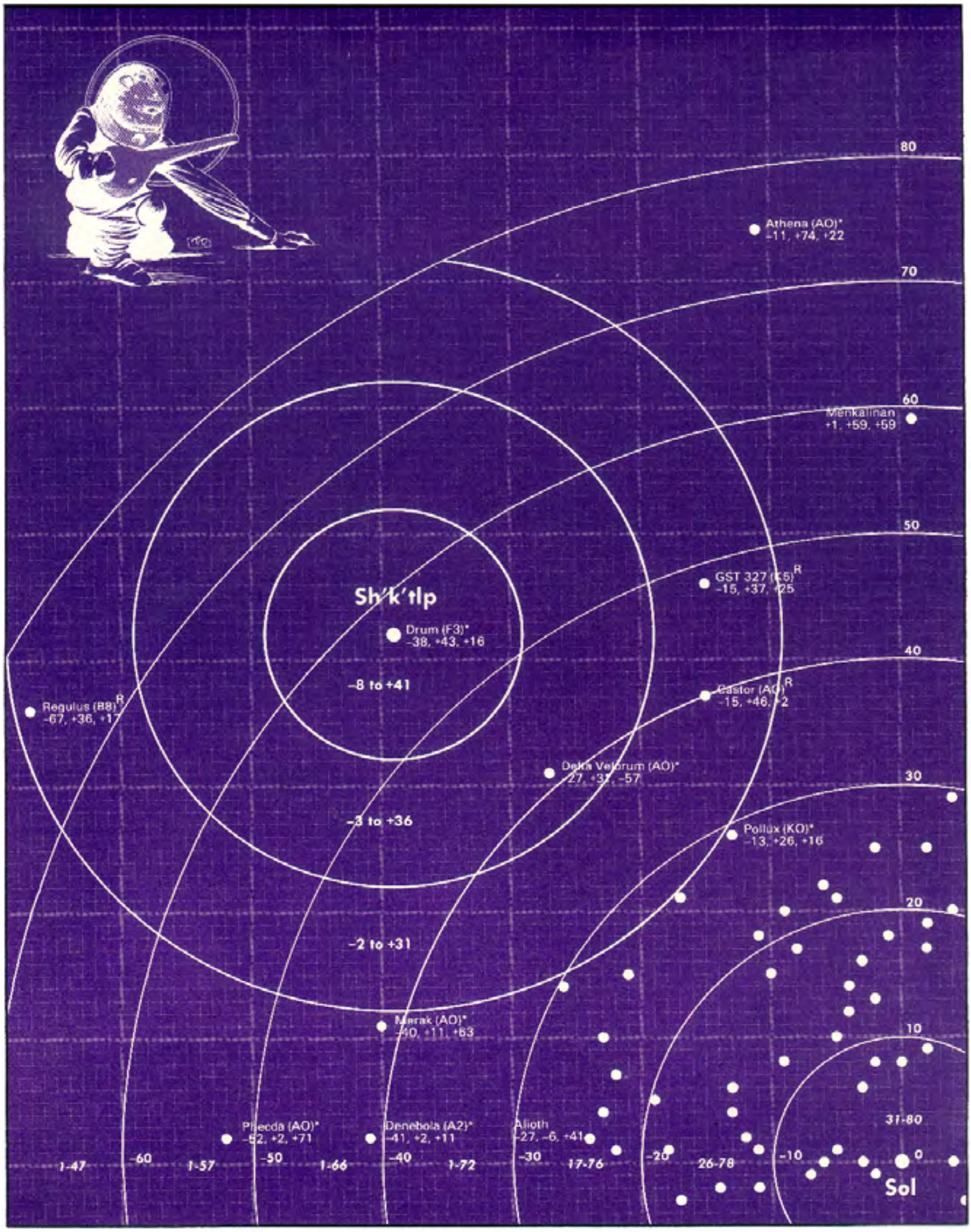
If this rule conflicts with rule 16.6, the character continues to move impulsively until he attains the requisite distance from all zombies and then he stops immediately.

[16.8] **When a character has completed Impulsive Movement, he returns to the full control of the human player.**

A character's Impulsive Movement ends when:

1. The zombie player decides to stop it;
2. The character has fired all his shots at a hidden zombie he cannot escape;
3. The character moves within sight of Peter and satisfies rule 16.6;
4. The character (or stack) expends its full Movement Allowance.

After all characters have been checked or moved, play proceeds with the Zombie Player-Turn. ▲


80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Athena (AO)*
-11, +74, +22
Menkalinan
+1, +59, +59
GST 327 (K5)R
-15, +37, +25
Sh'k'tlp
Drum (F3)*
-38, +43, +16
-8 to +41
Regulus (B8)R
-67, +36, +17
Castor (AO)R
-15, +46, +2
Delta Velorum (AO)*
-27, +37, -57
-3 to +36
Pollux (KO)*
-13, +26, +16
-2 to +31
Merak (AO)*
-40, +11, +63
Phecda (AO)*
-52, +2, +71
Denebola (A2)*
-41, +2, +11
Alioth
-27, -6, +41
31-80
1-47
-60
1-57
-50
1-66
-40
1-72
-30
17-76
-20
26-78
-10
Sol

RPG ROLE PLAYING GAMER

A UNIVERSE™ SUPPLEMENT

FIRST CONTACTS

MEET THE Sh'k'tlp: an astounding alien race

I. Introduction

The Sh'k'tlp are one of the three alien races that will appear in the *First Contacts* supplement for the *Universe*™ game. The Sh'k'tlp, a race of shape-changing mammals, are described in this Role-Playing Gamer feature for use by a Gamesmaster in campaigns. This is *not* an independent game or adventure. It is intended for use only by the Gamesmaster, and it is assumed that he is fully familiar with all the game systems discussed in the Gamesmaster's Guide of the *Universe* game. Players must not be allowed access to any information in this feature that their players would not already know. The new professions and skills included in this feature and parts of the Chronology may be explained to players.

To ease calculations in play, all units of time, measurement, and money are expressed in Human terms. If the GM wishes, he may substitute alien currency or measurements where appropriate. Most of the alien equipment is also described in Human terms. Again, the GM may alter these in accordance with the technology guidelines of the alien race.

This feature examines the Sh'k'tlp's physical, mental and social behavior; their history and technological development; samples of their artifacts; and their method of space travel. A complete system for generating Sh'k'tlp player characters and incorporating them in play is also included. Various charts and tables are presented for creating Sh'k'tlp characters, and the illustrations present samples of Sh'k'tlp technology and the relation of their space as compared to Human space.

Since the Sh'k'tlp domain only partially overlaps Human space, The GM may find it necessary to generate new star systems. As new stars are discovered, the GM should mark them down on a piece of paper, using the X, Y, and Z coordinates as found on the *Universe* Interstellar Display. The stars generated by the GM should be known to the players, since it is assumed that by the 24th century all possible stars within a 80 light-year radius of Earth will be known. However the domain of the Sh'k'tlp should be explained to the players only after contact has been made.

Expanding The Interstellar Display

The GM should locate Sol in the center of a piece of graph paper (with coordinates of 0, 0, 0). The X and Y coordinates extend 80 light years in all directions; likewise, the Z coordinate extends 80 light years above and below the plane of the X-Y coordinates. However, the absolute value of the *maximum Z coordinate* diminishes as the X or Y coordinate moves towards the 80 light-year limit; at the 80 light-year limit, the maximum Z coordinate can never be greater than 28 or less than -28. Thus, if the GM rolled a star with a Z coordinate of 35 or -42, it would not appear on his graph because the star would be outside the sphere encompassed by the 80 light-year radius. For each 10 light years along the X coordinate, the maximum Z coordinate diminshes as follows: at 0-10 light years, the Z coordinate is 80; at 20-30 light years, it is 76; at 30-40 light years, it is 72; at 40-50 light years, it is 66, at 50-60 light years, it is 57; at 60-70 light years, it is 47; and at 70-80 light years, it is 28.

The GM may generate stars to fill up the expanded interstellar display with a procedure that assigns each X-Y location a chance of having a star. The GM marks the display grid with these new stars (or lack thereof) as he checks each area. To check for the existence of a star, choose any X-Y coordinate that *does not already contain a star* and that has not already been checked. Conduct the following steps:

1. Roll percentile dice.
If the result is higher than 25, no star exists at that coordinate; mark a small slash through the coordinate. If the result is a 25 or less, the coordinate *may* contain a star; proceed to the next step.

2. Roll percentile dice again.
If the result is outside the upper and lower Z coordinate limits (as indicated above) for the band of the display the X-Y coordinate occupies, no star exists; mark the coordinate. If the result is within the indicated Z coordinate limits, a star exists there. If the dice result is even, treat the result as the Z coordinate. If the dice result is odd, treat it as the negative of the Z coordinate. Thus a roll of 28 indicates a Z coordinate of 28, while a roll of 27 indicates a Z coordinate of -27. Note the new star's complete coordinates on the display or on a separate sheet of paper.

3. Roll percentile dice again.
Locate the result of this roll on the Spectral Class Table to determine the spectral class and planet potential of the generated star on the map.

The First Contacts Interstellar Display, at left, shows the newly-discovered Sh'k'tlp area of space. Note that this display should be used in conjunction with the X, Y, and Z coordinates on the Universe Interstellar Display.

II. Chronology of the Years of Contact with the Sh'k'tlp

Note to the GM: The integration of an alien race into an ongoing campaign requires much care and attention. Players will be inundated with large amounts of information in a very short time, and easy assimilation of that information will be aided if the GM

has outlined his future history during the years of contact well in advance. Things to consider include: what each race knows about the other; which contact occurs first; why the contact occurs; when the second contact occurs. These problems must be addressed and dealt with in a coherent manner. This chronology is presented as an aid and inspiration to the GM.

This outlined future is only one possible sequence of events chosen out of those available; the decisions are based on logical interpretations of some very basic premises. The GM should feel free to use this outline in its entirety or parts of it in any manner he wishes. Its linear nature allows him to pick up the storyline at any point and to summarize the preceding events for the players prior to the start of play. For example, a GM chooses to use the outline as presented except he wishes the Sh'k'tlp contact to have occurred prior to the start of the campaign. Thus, he might begin his calendar in the year 2336, at the election of Chairman Vlad Pinsky. He verbally relates the entire history of the Sh'k'tlp encounters to his players (embellishing them, of course), and then proceeds to normal play. It is entirely expected any GM will alter the names or places to fit more coherently with the universe as he imagines it. The specific references to certain individuals in the events may be changed by the GM to allow players to run their characters in place of these individuals.

If the GM wishes to use the names, places and situations as described, he should notice certain references in the outline to individuals referred to as "skilled individuals." These particular events were included with the participation of the players' characters in mind. As in any situation where the players gain control, their own acumen (or lack thereof) will alter the best laid plans of any GM. Thus, any conclusion reached at the end of a situation as presented in the outline should not influence the ultimate resolution of that situation if played out by the players, and the GM should be mindful of this when using the outline as is.

The outline also indicates when players may attempt to generate alien characters. The percentage given at that point in the chronology indicates what chance a player has of his new character being an alien. The player must roll equal to or less than the listed percentage to be allowed to create an alien (otherwise, he must create a Human character). The percentage chance remains the same until the timeline advances and a new chance is listed for the race. As with the events in the chronology, the GM should use these percentages in context if he deviates from the history as written.

The Years A.D. 2310-2331

2310. Astronomers begin reporting momentary brightening and dimming in stars which have not, until this time, been suspected of being variable stars. The reported phenomena never lasts more than 2 seconds in any case, and manifests itself as a momentary variation with no apparent aftereffects or repercussions. Scientists are enthusiastic over what they suspect to be additional confirmation of the Big Bang theory regarding the creation of the universe. They report that these stars, all approximately 45 to 100 light years away from Sol with a right ascension between 6 and 10, roughly along the plane of the Earth's equator, are all older stars beginning to show evidence of the fluctuations which confirm their theories. As to why this variability was not noticed before, the scientists claim the recent advances in telescope technology involving the use of monopoles to polarize the plates of film has allowed them to detect the variances. The Group for Advanced Scientific Studies (GASS), located in New Palo Alto, remains skeptical about the findings.

2312. The theory regarding the variable stars reported in 2310 falls into disfavor as many new stars are discovered to have the same anomaly. GASS concludes that these anomalies are something brand new and should be further investigated by proper authorities. This was the result of an intensive two-year study.

2314. More variable stars are found. This leads the Beta Foundation to begin organizing an exploratory mission into unknown space. They ignore the lack of proper insurance and fund the project themselves.

2316. In a unanimous vote, GASS delays the Beta exploratory mission in order to allow another intensive two-year investigation by the newly formed sub-committee of GASS, the Committee for the Observation of Unexplained Properties. This group constitutes the very cream of the crop, scientifically speaking, of the minds within the Federation.

2318. GASS gives the go-ahead for the exploratory mission, with a warning to the commander of the mission to "proceed with great caution, for we aren't sure what's out there."

2321. After much delay, the Beta Foundation probe *Amorica* hyperjumps from Racine (formerly LFT 661; -21, +15, -10) to Pollux (-13, +26, +16), a class K0 star which has varied more than most within the last five years. After much publicity concerning this new venture, the ship's CommLink message confirming successful hyperjumping never arrives. It is presumed to have simply misjumped and is never heard from again. GASS disavows any responsibility for the mission and reminds the Federation of its initial hesitancy as to the wisdom of such a venture. The Beta Foundation takes a total loss on the mission, and declares financial bankruptcy.

2322. American Express issues a general statement to the effect that any mission which terminates at a star without a spaceport will not be insured for any amount. Thus, the onus for the funding of such projects must fall to the Federation, the only corporate entity solvent enough to absorb the possible loss.

2328. A Heinz Corp exploration mission, headed by a young psion, Vlad Pinsky, discovers a large cache of monopoles in the unexplored regions of the Ross 41 system (+4, +29, +5), which opens up that system for colonization and thus rapidly expands the Heinz Corp's bankroll. Some of that wealth trickles down to Pinsky as a finder's fee. His name soon becomes a household word for guts, determination and luck. "You're a real pinsky!" catches on throughout the Federation as a phrase meaning "You're luckier than you deserve."

2330. The Heinz Corp begins to underwrite missions designed to expand the scope of mankind's knowledge. They accept the risks involved and forge ahead without any insurance coverage. GASS claims the Heinz Corp mentality will lead to the downfall of the local economy. They advise caution and proceed to set up a committee to study the problem . . . .

2331. The Heinz Corp has by this time established many diversified interests in the sector of space surrounding the Ross system, including large mining and ore refining outposts. They also develop a reputation for shady dealings, and Vlad Pinsky publicly disassociates himself from them for that reason. His public statement causes panic in the Heinz camp, and they begin to take greater and greater risks in the attempt to maintain their momentum. One of their routine mining excursions results in the ship *Christopher Martin* misjumping; the CommLink message that reaches the Federation indicates it lies outside the boundary of explored space and that it has been wrecked somehow. Heinz Corp hires a group of skilled individuals to recover the ship. The *Charon's Ferry* hyperjumps to GST 327 (-15, +46, +2) to recover the lost ship. There the crew encounters and explores an abandoned alien spaceship, and the first contact with intelligent extraterrestrial life occurs.

2331.4. The crew return and discuss their find with local

Federation officials, who call in representatives of GASS to evaluate the Federation's options. In their first intelligent move in years, GASS keeps the contact secret and investigates the evidence objectively and thoroughly.

2331.9. GASS finalizes their examination of the alien vessel, and advises the federation officials to "come clean" with the public and reveal the contact. The federation agrees, dubbing the ship *Teardrop I*, and publicly announces the accidental contact and the story of the brave exploratory team. The grisly details of the first crew's fate are fortunately left out of the story. GASS announces the extent of their involvement in the project and begins a campaign to lift the insurance ban for exploratory craft. They begin to search for the alien home star, setting up a sub-committee to examine the *Teardrop I* for any clues.

The Years A.D. 2332-2333

2332.1. In an amazingly short (for them) amount of time, GASS announces the theoretical location of the alien home system, and commissions a contest to see which corporation will be first to prepare and ready an exploration mission. American Express (having hired Vlad Pinsky as advisor) finishes first in the race, and the *Drumbeater* is allowed to depart to greet the aliens as official emissary of the Human race. Vlad Pinsky commands the vessel, which includes a crew of star sailors and skilled individuals.

2332.3. Arriving at the Sh'k'tlp home system, official contact is established with a Sh'k'tlp diplomatic ship. However, a snag develops. The "rats" (as the Sh'k'tlp are called by the *Drumbeater* crew members) refuse to allow the crew to land on any Sh'k'tlp worlds. Three star sailors are killed by Sh'k'tlp security robots when the Humans make moves they did not announce in advance. This incident leads to the immediate withdrawal of the diplomatic mission and the mistaken impression that the Sh'k'tlp are a vicious, aggressive race which must be dealt with. A general "call to alert" within the Federation takes place. In actuality, the Sh'k'tlp assumed the star sailors were predators that had impersonated the Humans, and shot them accordingly. They were only doing their best to protect the Humans and assumed their actions would be readily understood.

2332.4. Through the intercession of Vlad Pinsky, contact is reestablished, and the *Drumbeater* returns to the Sh'k'tlp system. Permission is still not granted to land on any worlds, however. This attitude creates suspicion among Human intelligence circles, and contingency plans are made for armed assault on Sh'k'tlp space. GASS creates a sub-committee to investigate all aspects of Sh'k'tlp behavior, the Committtee for the Observation of Sh'k'tlp Thought. They promise to have their recommendations ASAP.

2332.6. A Sh'k'tlp bubble/rod ship arrives at Leonis (-13, +6, +5). The Sh'k'tlp send a cordial greeting to all Humankind, expressing sorrow for the recent misunderstandings and hoping for mutual understanding and the establishment of beneficial trading agreements. They propose a unitary currency, and an exchange of scientific information and specialists, particularly in the fields of predator control and space travel. The administrator of the local spaceport, acting without authorization from the Federation, intercepts the diplomatic mission with a squadron of Daggers. The squadron is unable to penetrate the Sh'k'tlp null-field and are further thwarted by the ship's maneuverability. The Sh'k'tlp ship dives for the star as if it intends to crash into it, but then assumes an orbit around the star at a distance which would be impossible for any Federal ship to approach to do damage. When the Federation learns of the unprovoked attack, they put the local administrator on trial and, when he is found guilty, they execute him in a public manner — more for the benefit of the Sh'k'tlp than for the Human viewers. The Sh'k'tlp are unimpressed. Vlad Pinksy continues with his arguments to have the Sh'k'tlp let him visit their world. Not quite knowing who Pinsky is, the Sh'k'tlp continue their indifference towards his ship.

2332.8. Federation committee chairman Fritz Riswold arrives at Leonis via a Federal cruiser to negotiate with the Sh'k'tlp. The desire for friendly relations is made clear, with the Sh'k'tlp emphasizing the benefits from mutual trade. After many hours of painstaking negotiation, involving many problems of translation, an agreement is reached which both sides are pleased with. Riswold, while announcing the final agreement, makes an allusion to a "pound of flesh" in reference to the negotiating skills of the Sh'k'tlp. This statement is misinterpreted by many who are unaware of Riswold's true meaning, which remains hidden. In the Sh'k'tlp home system, Vlad Pinsky beats the local Sh'k'tlp administrator in a game of dd'kl'jy, a Sh'k'tlp gambling game similar to the Human game of Hearts. This feat wins the everlasting respect of the Sh'k'tlp for Vlad, and he alone is allowed to travel down to the surface of the home world (Sh'k'tlp).

GENERATE SH'K'TLP CHARACTER: 5%.

2333.1. GASS announces they have discerned the best way to win the respect of the Sh'k'tlp is to beat them at a competitive game. They advise all Humans to brush up on their games of chance, and advise all Human corporations to "keep their wallets well hidden" as they fear manipulation by these highly intelligent aliens. Vlad Pinsky is by default nominated as the first official ambassador to Sh'k'tlp. The Sh'k'tlp themselves announce Vlad has been named Jfh'jg't (or "honorary predator hunter") and is forever welcome in their Commonwealth.

2333.3. Each race sends a friendship fleet to the other's capital world. The Human ships join Pinsky's ship in orbit around Sh'k'tlp, and his entire crew is welcomed on that world as heroes. Pinsky acts as mediator for the newly arrived Humans and the Sh'k'tlp dignitaries. Various arrangements occur to facilitate easy transfer of information. In Human space, the Sh'k'tlp fleet arrives with three ships in tow (one being the *Amorica* and the other an Omega lifeboat); the third, however, is of unknown origin. GASS represents the Human scientific community and announces a two-year study on the third ship to discover its origins. The

officials of the Federation do not allow GASS to appropriate the ship for this purpose and instead conduct a search for skilled individuals to examine the ship. GASS responds by branding the result of any such investigation to be without substance.

2333.6. Beginning with the Exxox Corp, many Human corporate conglomerations begin unofficial expeditions into Sh'k'tlp space to entice them to conclude separate, individual agreements for trade. At the same time, Sh'k'tlp groups begin similar missions into Human space, wheeling and dealing with all the influential Human businesses. The slow moving channels of the diplomatic process are ignored by greedy entrepreneurs on both sides, resulting in a flurry of trade which quickly breaks down due to a number of small but unfortunately violent confrontations between rival Human and Sh'k'tlp corporations. The violence is not confined to Human-Sh'k'tlp confrontations, but also to Human-Human and Sh'k'tlp-Sh'k'tlp confrontations as well, as many vie for the millions of Trans to be made. As the many hazards inherent in such long voyages for trade become apparent, the initial enthusiasm soon leads to skepticism. The long distances and possible violence along the way or at either end of a journey create growing tension between the races.

2333.9. The Federation and the Sh'k'tlp Commonwealth agree to make GST-327 a gateway system (in fact, the Federation renames the star Gateway). Any spaceship traveling from a Sh'k'tlp star to a Human star or vice versa must stop there to be inspected and registered. Construction of a bi-racial spaceport begins in orbit around R'th (1 AU from Gateway). The Sh'k'tlp request a ban on Human travel to their space until the station is complete and operational. Vlad Pinsky, now a resident of Sh'k'tlp, is asked by the Federation to oversee the development of the spaceport and all support facilities. He agrees to the idea, promising an answer after "an extensive study."

GENERATE SH'K'TLP CHARACTER: 10%.

The Years A.D. 2334-2338.8

2334. The incidents of illegal trade begin to drop off as the climate for agreement becomes more favorable. Many business types search for a quick Tran, but opportunity does not knock during this period. Most are willing to wait and see if the agreements hold up and if mutually acceptable arrangements will be concluded. Some, like GASS, are impatient with this slow, painstaking process and take some matters into their own hands.

2334.3. The investigation of the ship of unknown origin (dubbed the *Ruby Slipper*) yields no hard information. Humans are still unaware of the creator's nature or abilities. Some very general tendencies are concluded: the creators are obviously intelligent, painstaking, and aggressive. They appear humanoid in form, but the number of limbs is unknown. They "see" and "hear" as we do. GASS declares these assumptions to be incorrect and denounces the entire investigation.

2334.6. The Federation revokes GASS's scientific grant.

2334.9. Illegal military ships of Eon Flashcorp arrive in secret on a remote Sh'k'tlp colony world (Kr'd'm). Their heavy weapons easily cow the residents. Flashcorp boss, Garn Tweezle, seizes the local Sh'k'tlp fleet and drives the residents from their capital city. His intentions are to uncover the secrets of Sh'k'tlp technology by force and sell the information to the highest bidder. Elsewhere, Vlad Pinsky accepts the post of Chairman of Gateway Corp, even though this relocation causes him great heartache; he has come to love Sh'k'tlp and its people. GASS, after a frantic struggle to find new funding, is forced to officially "fold" for lack of money.

2335.1. Word of the Flashcorp attack on Kr'd'm reaches the Sh'k'tlp Commonwealth. Assuming this action is sponsored by the Federation, the Sh'k'tlp immediately pull out of the Gateway project and cease all communications with Humans, whom they brand as predators. An emergency meeting of all Sh'k'tlp Commonwealth members is called to devise a method of ridding Kr'd'm of the Human aggressors. Vlad Pinsky hears the news just before leaving Sh'k'tlp and decides to stay there, refusing the post of chairman of Gateway. Sh'k'tlp declares him an honorary Commonwealth member, with all commensurate rights and privileges. Federation Chairman Riswold hears of the attack through the Federation intelligence network and issues an ultimatum to Flashcorp: *Leave Kr'd'm or face the seizure of all Flashcorp capital being kept in any Federal banks.* Garn Tweezle issues a retaliatory statement: *If that happens, the Sh'k'tlp on Kr'd'm begin to die.* The Federation as a whole is aghast at the obvious and horrid terrorism.

2335.6. After the Federation ordered a complete investigation of Flashcorp's motives and methods, it was revealed that GASS was the actual guiding force behind the invasion of Kr'd'm. They wanted the secret of the Sh'k'tlp null-field (Hg'jd'kn), which allows the hulls of the Sh'k'tlp spaceships to withstand the great heat of stars as they "skim" them to achieve FTL travel. GASS intended to steal this information and then reveal it to the Federation, claiming they had deduced it from already known Sh'k'tlp information and thus greatly raising their public image. This conspiracy was uncovered by Krym Starvy, special secret agent of the Federation, and a few select skilled individuals. Starvy posed as a member of GASS, infiltrated the organization, and brought the entire operation down. He had been known as a steady operator in the past, but this was the crowning achievement of his career. GASS disbands, never to be heard from in that form again in Federation history. The stalemate on Kr'd'm continues as the Sh'k'tlp grow increasingly impatient with the Humans' inability to make a decision in this matter.

2335.7. A group of skilled individuals, apparently acting entirely on their own, infiltrate Kr'd'm and overthrow the Flashcorp coup without much loss of Sh'k'tlp life. The Federation breathes a sigh of relief, as these brave individuals have freed them from making a difficult political decision. Shortly thereafter, it is revealed that Vlad Pinsky sponsored the infiltration of Kr'd'm, and the group included both Human and Sh'k'tlp members. These individuals are hailed as heroes by all sides, thus bridging the communications gap between the two races.

2336.3. Federation chairman Riswold dies of natural causes; Vlad Pinsky is by acclamation elected chairman of the Federation, the youngest Human ever to hold the post. He immediately begins a motion within the Federation Council to admit Sh'k'tlp as a full member. On Sh'k'tlp, they are all in favor of this development, even as they mourn the passing of Riswold, a man who had gained respect through his tough but fair negotiations. The Sh'k'tlp feel that by being admitted to the Federation, their trade agreements will increase both in number and in profit margin, thus offsetting any losses due to possible Federal tariffs.

2337.2. Sh'k'tlp is admitted into the Federation while retaining its own Commonwealth autonomy. This joining is purely business in nature, and no political agreements of any kind are reached. Vlad Pinsky does not exert control over any Sh'k'tlp holdings. The Gateway project is resumed as a bi-racial effort, with plans begun for the construction of four more such outposts, thus easing the movement of goods and information between the two races. All movement will flow through these gateways. A motion begins in the Sh'k'tlp Commonwealth to admit Humanity.

GENERATE SH'K'TLP CHARACTER: 20%.

2338.8. Gateways One and Two are completed and operating. Debate continues within the Sh'k'tlp Commonwealth concerning the Human question. Trade begins to flourish between the two

"The Sh'k'tlp on Kr'd'm will begin to die." The Federation is aghast at this obvious and horrid terrorism.

races, and many bonds are forged between these two unlikely cohabitants. Although the examination of the *Ruby Slipper* continues, no knowledge of its origin has been uncovered.

Note to the GM: The references to the unknown craft, the so-called *Ruby Slipper,* indicate that there is another alien spacefaring race to be discovered. The GM may wish to use an alien race he has created as the owners of this craft.

III. New Professions and Skills

Four new professions and eight new skills are available to human characters. As noted, some of these are also available to Sh'k'tlp characters, in addition to those professions and skills unique to that race (listed in the following race description). Certain professions and skills are availble only after a given date in the history of the Federation; to conform to the developments in the chronology and the time period in which the GM has set his campaign.

Some of these new professions and skills may not be the type a *Universe*™ character would be too interested in (such as artist or missionary). They are, however, ideal livelihoods for non-player characters and may be used as a guide by the GM when creating such individuals for his campaign.

All such professions and skills are presented from a human point of view and, if taken by a Sh'k'tlp character, must be altered in accordance with their profession, skill, and technology rules. The race description also lists additional restrictions on professions and skills available to alien characters.

1. Modifications to Fields of Study and Professions

The Field of Study skill list in 6.3 of the Gamemaster's Guide is modified to include the following new skills:

Theoretical Science: Xenology, Sh'k'tlp technology (after the year 2335).

Humanities: Culture, art.

The Mind: Body control, psychometry.

Remember that all skills made available to a character by his fields of study may be acquired with initial Skill Points *and* professions Skill Points.

The *Skills Available* list for certain human professions in 7.9 of the Gamemaster's Guide is modified to include the following new skills:

Civil Inspector: Xenology, Sh'k'tlp technology (after 2335).

Enforcer: Security.

Explorer: Culture, xenology, Sh'k'tlp technology (after 2335).

Handyman: Security.

Interstellar Trader: Sh'k'tlp technology (after 2335).

Lawman: Security.

Scout: Culture, xenology, Sh'k'tlp technology (after 2335).

Space Pirate: Culture, security.

Space Technician: Security.

Spacetrooper: Security.

Spy: Security.

Star Sailor: Sh'k'tlp technology (after 2335).

If the GM wishes to add new professions and skills to his campaign, any already-existing characters should be considered familiar with those new skills included in his fields of study or profession. That is, the character receives an **X** for each skill as described in 7.6 of the Gamemaster's Guide.

Skills that become available to a character on a given date may be acquired with initial Skill Points if he reaches the age of 20 after the listed date (that is, after his fields of study are chosen and before a profession in chosen). Dated skills may be acquired with professional Skill Points if the character is fully generated after the listed date. When a group of characters is generated, the GM should decide at what date the process will be completed beforehand. If a character cannot take a dated skill because it is not yet available (but he is in the proper field of study or profession), it will become available to him when the listed date is reached in the GM's campaign. The character will then be considered familiar with the skill.

2. Professions

ARTIST

Available to Humans

A creator of visuals, dance, song, or word; the artist is important throughout the far-flung colonies of the Federation, where he/she sparks creative thought necessary to the growth and maintenance of civilization. An artist is often an important member of exploratory expeditions, trained to see the patterns and connections that a more linear-minded soldier or scientist might miss. The artist is a specialist in non-verbal communication with entities who do not share a common language. Often assigned or invited to isolated colonies or military outposts, an artist can travel where other professions would not be permitted and is often given extraordinary access to leaders and other key personnel.

Prerequisites: Study of the humanities with art chosen as an initial skill; Characteristic Rating of at least Dexterity 5, Intelligence 5, Mental Power 2, and Empathy 5.

Skill Point Modifier: 6.

Skills Available: Art (2 additonal levels required), psychokinesis (only if mind studied and MP 4 or greater), comput/robot tech, disguise, forgery/counterfeiting, xenology.

Benefits:

A. 1 Tran cash.
B. 3 Trans cash.
C. 1 Tran x Empathy rating in cash.
D. 3 Trans x Empathy rating in cash.
E. 7 Trans x Empathy rating in cash; holographer.
F. 15 Trans x Empathy rating in cash; Manner 36sd robot with construction and holographer systems.

CONTACTOR

Available to Humans and Sh'k'tlp after 2330

A specialist in contact, communication, investigation and negotiation with intelligent alien races. A contactor finds employment with federally-sponsored missions to alien space and official greeting parties for alien missions to Federal space. In the early stages of contact with a race, a contactor may be sent out alone or with a small party to commence interaction. A contactor is also valued by enterprises seeking to do business with aliens.

Prerequisites: Study of 2 of the following: theoretical science, applied science, or the humanities; Characteristic Ratings of at least Intelligence 7, Mental Power 3, and Empathy 6.

Skill Point Modifier: 8.

Skills available: Physics, biology, astronomy, suit tech, electro tech, recruiting, law, linguistics, diplomacy (Human only),teaching, EVA, survival, air vehicles, marine vehicles, planetology, culture, xenology, Sh'k'tlp technology.

Benefits:
A. 2 Trans cash.
B. 500 mils x Empathy rating in cash; Civ Level 6 expedition suit.
C. 1 Tran x Empathy rating in cash; Civ Level 6 expedition suit; Civ Level 7 translator.
D. 3 Trans x Empathy rating in cash; Civ Level 7 expedition suit; Civ Level 7 translator; holographer.
E. 10 Trans x Empathy rating in cash; Civ Level 7 expedition suit; Manner 38sdf robot with recorder, information and language systems.
F. 20 trans x Empathy rating in cash; Civ Level 7 expedition suit; Soidistant V-201 robot with electro tech, bio, holographer, information, language, and self-activation systems.

MISSIONARY
Available to Humans

A learned individual who promotes the role of religion in building culture and in enhancing the well-being of individuals. A missionary studies the underlying elements of life, creativity, and spiritual power within the universe. As a representative of a particular religion, a missionary will be sponsored by that organization and will seek to further its aims. A missionary may be a student of mind-body relationships and may have limited healing abilities. Journies to colonies, outposts, and exploration missions are often underwritten by the Home Church.

Prerequisites: Study of the humanities; Characteristic Ratings of at least Intelligence 6, Mental Power 3, and Empathy 7.

Skill Point Modifier: 6.

Skills Available: Unarmed combat, diagnosis (2 levels only), treatment (2 levels only), recruiting, survival, urban, any environs.

Benefits:
A. Nothing.
B. 1 Tran cash, first aid kit.
C. 2 Trans cash; first aid kit; Civ Level 7 translator.
D. 4 Trans cash; first aid kit; Civ Level 8 translator.
E. 10 Trans cash; first aid kit; Civ Level 8 translator; Interstellar CommLink (all transmission costs paid by church).
F. 24 Trans cash; Civ level 8 mediscanner; Civ Level 8 translator; Interstellar CommLink (all transmission costs paid by church).

PATTERNIST
Available to Humans

A member of a unique, dynamic profession that combines elements of psionics with cultural studies; in an earlier time the patternist might have been known as a sociologist, anthropologist, philosopher, and mystic. Through training and senstivity, the patternist is deeply aware of life and patterning going on within the cosmos; the underlying unities and connections among all things is the main field of study. A patternist has limited precognitive powers, which makes him a valuable consultant to all levels of government. A patternist is not as developed psionically as a thinker but, through empathetic sense, can perceive imformation in psychic ways and has an ability to heal others.

Prerequisites: Study of the humanities and the mind with culture chosen as an initial skill; Characteristic Ratings of at least Intelligence 8, mental Power 4, and Empathy 8.

Skill Point Modifier: 10.

Skills Available: Mind control, *all* scientific skills, xenology, Sh'k'tlp technology (after 2335).

Benefits:
All patternists may enter a psionic institute (see 10.5, Gamemaster's Guide)
A. 1 Tran cash.
B. 3 Trans cash; first aid kit.
C. 1 Tran x Empathy rating in cash; Civ Level 6 mediscanner.
D. 2 Trans x Empathy rating in cash; Civ Level 8 mediscanner.
E. 5 Trans x Empathy rating in cash; any two scanners.
F. 12 Trans x Empathy rating in cash; psionic rig, any two scanners.

3. Skills

New skills taken by a character may be recorded on the blank lines beneath the vehicle skills on the character record.

Some skill descriptions use the term *Equivalent Skill* when a Human skill is applied to use of an alien object. For example, a Sh'k'tlp *forcer* (a weapon, see Section IV, 16) is fired by using the laser/stun pistol skill, even though the weapon is not strictly a stun pistol and is certainly not a laser pistol. This modification has been done to reduce the need for new skills for alien characters. Thus, the laser/stun pistol skill is the equivalent skill for a forcer. When any alien object is being used (by an alien or human character) and an Equivalent Skill is not assigned by these rules, the GM should declare an appropriate Human skill as the Equivalent Skill. In addition, if a Human character is using an alien object, his xenology or Sh'k'tlp technology skill must also be considered.

One new skill presented here, *perception,* is different from all other skills in that all characters (of all races) are considered to possess it. It is strongly recommended that the GM add this skill to all the characters in his campaign.

ARTS *(Interpersonal Skill)*
8 Levels/Limit: Empathy

The character is skilled in the creation and interpretation of music, dance, performing, writing, or pictorialization (such as painting, sculpture, etc.). He may be able to entertain an audience or stimulate a reader or viewer. His accomplishments may aid communications with Humans, or affect their mood (in a manner similar to propaganda). His talents may enhance communication with non-Human intelligent beings as well, creating a common bond when purely analytical responses might fail. Add the character's *Intelligence* Rating and the square of his Skill Level to the Base Chance for the following tasks. Required times are not given for these tasks as they vary widely, depending on the situation.

T► Write a document, create a picture, give a performance, etc., to impress an individual (that is, put a person in awe of your talents): **35%.** If this task is performed successfully, the impressed person will become more friendly with the character or even offer to purchase the product the character creates (if tangible) or to hire the character for additional performances.

T► Write a document, create a picture, give a performance, etc., that affects an individual's mood and compels action: **25%.** Successful performance of this task may be equated with a successful propaganda program. The affected individual will be inclined to take action inspired by the character's creation.

T► Affect the mood of a crowd: **15%.** Successful performance of this task may be equated with controlling the "mob spirit" of a crowd. If the attempt fails by **30 or more,** the crowd may turn somewhat hostile.

T► Communicate with an alien intelligence: **5%.** This task may be performed instead of, or in addition, to the xenology task of similar name. Its chance of success may vary widely, depending on the type of alien encountered.

A character who takes this skill should declare what artistic endeavor he will generally practice (dance, painting, holomaking, etc.). A character who rolls a **0, 1,** or **2** on either die when attempting an art task receives 1 Experience Point.

BODY CONTROL *(Psionic Skill)*
8 Levels/Limit: Empathy

The character can alter his internal metabolism through the powers of his mind. He can enhance his immune and regenerative systems to heal himself without the aid of medical technology. He can increase his survival chances by decreasing his body's need for oxygen, water and food. Add the character's *Mental Power* Rating and the square of his Skill Level to the Base Chance for the following tasks.

T► Alter own biological system for survival: **30%.** If this task is successfully performed, for every 10 points or fraction thereof below the modified chance the dice result indicates, the character's use of oxygen is reduced by **15%** (up to a maximum of **90%**), and the character need not perform the survival task (see 15.0, Gamemaster's Guide) for one day. Other characters in the party do not receive the benefits of success; they must perform the survival task. Once a character has successfully altered his biological state, he remains in a trance-like state and takes no action until he brings himself out of it (at any time he wishes, but then the positive aspects of success cease to exist).

T► Diagnose self when wounded or ill: **90%.** The Base Chance for this task is reduced by hits received per the Diagnosis skill (12.0, Gamemaster's Guide). It is conducted as a diagnosis task, except that no equipment is used and the chance is modified by the character's *Mental Power* Rating and the square of his body control Skill Level (instead of Intelligence and diagnosis).

T► Treat self when wounded or ill: **1%.** This task is like the Treatment skill task (12.0, Gamemaster's Guide) and may be performed only if the character's ailments have been successfully diagnosed (either by the body control skill or another character's diagnosis skill). Successful diagnosis may increase the Skill Level. Again no equipment is used, and the character's *Mental Power* Rating and the square of his body control Skill Level modify the Base Chance (instead of Intelligence and treatment).

A character who rolls a **0, 1** or **2** on either die when attempting a body control task receives 1 Experience point.

CULTURE *(Scientific Skill)*
8 Levels/Limit: Intelligence

The character is knowledgeable in various cultural arts and sciences, including sociology, anthropology, archaeology, political science, and cultural psychology. He understand the dynamics of human culture, how it grows, how it maintains itself, the many forms it can take, and how it may stagnate and die. He is skilled in synthesizing knowledge and can often enhance the effectiveness of tasks in other branches of endeavor. For success in a culture task, to the Base Chance add the character's *Intelligence* Rating and the square of his Skill Level.

T► Enhance diplomatic endeavor between Humans, enhance economic task, or enhance law task: **40%.** Immediately before the character, or any other character in his party, performs any of the preceding tasks, the character may perform this task to improve the chances of the succeeding task. If the dice result is less than the modified chance, increase the modified chance of success with the related skill by an amount equal to that by which the attempt succeeded. Conversely, if the attempt fails, decrease the Base Chance of the task to be attempted by an amount equal to that by which the attempt failed.

T► Deduce societal or cultural information about the nature of a Human or Human community through examination of its artifacts: **30%.** This task is especially useful when examining ruins or abandoned Human settlements.

T► Understand alien artifact: **10%.** This task is identical to the task of the same name in the xenology skill description. However, no piece of equipment will increase the character's Skill Level.

T► Deduce information about the societal or cultural nature of an alien through examination of its artifacts: **10%.** This task may be performed if the nature of the involved artifacts are understood by the character. See task of similar title in the xenology skill description for further information.

A major function of the culture skill is a prerequisite for the xenology skill. As described in that skill listing, a character's xenology Skill Level may never exceed culture Skill Level. A character who rolls a **0** or **1** on either die when attempting a cultural task receives 1 Experience Point.

PERCEPTION
9 Levels/No Characteristic Limit

Perception is a measure of the character's intuition developed as a result of his adventuring experience. It is used during play to determine if a character notices a detail about a situation, notices something in the distance, hears a footfall, etc.

Every character automatically possesses the perception skill when generated. Human and Sh'k'tlp characters initially possess this skill at Level 2. No initial Skill Points or professional Skill Points need be spent to acquire the skill, nor may the skill be improved by the expenditure of such points. Perception may be improved during play by amassing Perception Experience Points. Perception is used in play in either of two ways:

1. If the GM wishes to allow a character a chance to notice

something not readily apparent that is related purely to the senses (sight, hearing, smell, etc.), he instructs the character to conduct a *Perception Check* by rolling *one* die. If the die result is equal to or less than the character's Perception Level, the GM informs of the occurrence or time. If the die result is greater than the character's Perception Level, the GM provides no information.

2. If the GM wishes to allow a character a chance to notice something related to a particular area of expertise, he instructs the character to conduct a Perception Check by rolling *percentile dice*. The chance of success equals the character's Perception Level *plus* the level he has with the skill associated with the item or event. The *higher* of these two levels is *squared before adding*. **Example:** A skimmer is flying by the character at the edge of view. He has Perception 3 and Air Vehicles 5, so he has a 28% chance (5^2 +3), of noticing the vehicle and correctly identifying it as a skimmer. Any one of many different skills may be associated with a Perception Check; the most common would be scientific, technical, environ, or vehicle skill. However, any skill might apply, depending on the situation.

A character who rolls a **1** on either die when conducting a Perception Check receives 1 Perception Experience Point.

PSYCHOMETRY *(Psionic Skill)*
8 Levels/ Limit: Empathy

The character has the psionic ability to receive information about an object by touching or holding it. This information can include the history of the object, its nature or function, and who has held it or possessed it previously. A psionic rig does not aid this skill, nor is there any danger of psionic backlash. When the character uses this skill, the GM rolls percentile dice secretly and adds the character's *Mental Power* Rating and the square of his Skill Level to the Base Chance for the following task.

T► Receive information about an object by holding it or laying hands on it: **30%.** This task may be performed only if the character's bare hands come in contact with the object. Time required: **10 minutes.** If the task is performed unsuccessfully, no information is forthcoming. If the dice result is over the modified chance by **40 or more,** the GM gives the character false information about the object. If the attempt is successful, the GM gives information about the object according to the following guidelines: if the dice roll is equal to the chance or up to **10 points below** it, give sketchy information about the history of the object over the past week, but reveal nothing about what the object is or does; if from **11 to 20** points below the chance, reveal what has happened to the object, including who has held it, over the past two months; if from **21 to 30** points below, reveal the history of the object over the past five years and more correct and detailed information about the nature of the object; if from **41-50** points below, give the history of the object over the past 25 years and more information about its nature, and if **51 or more** points below the chance, the GM discloses as much information about the object as the character wishes or needs to know to further his interests.

The information that a psychometrist receives is usually in the form of visions and impressions; it is usually not hard scientific data. If the psychometrist is familiar with a particular brand of science, engineering, art, or culture, he will be better able to correctly interpret and understand what he is "picking up" from the object. Thus, a psychometrist with no technical skills trying to tune into an artifact that performs a technical function will pick up impressions, but will not have the background to precisely interpret those impressions. A character who rolls a **0** or **1** on either die when attempting the skill psychometry receives 1 Experience Point.

The character has the psionic ability to receive information about an object by touching or holding it.

SECURITY *(Technical Skill)*
7 Levels/Limit: Intelligence

The character is familiar with all kinds of alarms and security systems. He may leave traps that will warn him of an intrusion while he is away (such as the hair-across-the-door-opening trick) and is skilled in avoiding such traps. he may disconnect alarm systems and detect intrusions into areas that he has prepared for detection and, to a lesser extent, into unprepared areas. The character's *Dexterity* Rating and the square of his Skill Level are added to the Base Chance of the following tasks.

T► Prepare area for secret detection: **25%.** Time required: **1 hour.** If the character is using a *locator* (a Sh'k'tlp device, see Section IV, 15), his Skill Level is increased by **2** for this task, and the time required is reduced to **1 Action Round** (15 seconds). If the dice result is **less than or equal to** the modified chance, the character will be informed upon his return to the area, whether or not there were any intrusions and, if so, the nature of that intrusion. If the result is **more than 30 greater** than the modified chance, the character is given erroneous information. **Exception:** If the intruder has security skill and performs the next task successfully, the character is not informed at all.

T► Enter area undetected: **45%.** If the area has been prepared for detection, subtract the square of the preparer's security Skill Level from the chance. The GM rolls dice secretly; if the attempt fails, this fact is not revealed until the detection of the intrusion.

T► Detect intrusion in unprepared area: **10%.** Time required: **30 minutes.** If the character is using a locator, his Skill Level is increased by **2** and the time required is reduced to **4 Action Rounds** (1 minute). If the percentile dice result is **equal to or less than** the modified chance, the character is informed of any intrusions.

T► Disconnect alarm: **60%.** Time required: **30 minutes.** The character's Skill Level is increased by **1** (or **2**) if he is using a Civ Level 7 (or 8) electrokit. The square of the alarm system's Civ Level is subtracted from the Base Chance. Only one attempt may be made. If the attempt fails by **30 or more,** the character has set off the alarm.

A character who rolls a **0, 1** or **2** on either die when attempting a security task receives 1 Experience Point.

XENOLOGY *(Scientific Skill)*
7 Levels/Limit: Intelligence

The character is familiar with varied forms of alien life encountered by the Federation and Human theories of alien intelligence, technology, and culture. His background in anthropology, archaeology, and extraterrestrial phenomena allows him to examine alien artifacts to discern their function and perhaps even use them. He may attempt to communicate with possibly intelligent alien life. Once communication is established, he will best know how to express concepts to aliens and to understand their various expressions.

A character may not choose the xenology skill unless he also

has the culture skill. Furthermore, his xenology Skill Level may never be higher than his culture Skill Level. If the receipt of an Experience Point would increase a character's xenology level beyond his cultural level, the Experience Point is assigned to culture instead. To the Base Chance of each of the following tasks, add the character's *Intelligence* Rating and the square of his Skill Level. The GM should roll secretly for each xenology task.

T► Understand alien artifact: **10%.** Time required depends on sophistication of the artifact. If the character is using a visual scanner, energy scanner, or other piece of equipment that the GM feels will aid identification, he may increase the character's Skill Level by **2** for the attempt. If the character is successful, the GM informs him about the nature of the artifact. If the character fails **by more than 30**, the device is damaged, or harms the character, or both (depending on the nature of the device).

T► Use alien artifact: **30%.** If the purpose of an alien artifact is understood (either through successful completion of the above task or an outside source), the character may attempt to use it (e.g., fire a weapon or control a vehicle). In addition to his intelligence or the square of his xenology Skill Level, the GM adds the level the character has with the Equivalent Skill for the item's use to the Base Chance. If successful, the character may use the device as if he had a Skill Level of **1** with it. If he fails by **more than 30**, the device is damaged, or harms the character, or both (depending on the nature of the device).

T► Deduce information about the physical or mental nature of an alien through examination of its artifacts: **10%.** This task may be performed only if the natures of the involved artifacts are understood by the character. The time required depends on the number and sophistication of the artifacts examined. The chance of success for this task and the information the GM reveals if successful are highly variable, depending on the types of artifacts examined and previous knowledge of the race possessed by the character. If the character fails the attempt by **more than 30**, the GM should reveal erroneous information about the aliens.

T► Communicate with intelligent alien encountered for the first time: **10%.** Time required: **2 to 5 hours.** The alien's Intelligence Rating is also added to the Base Chance. If successful, the involved parties may exchange a simple vocabulary of words. If unsuccessful by **more than 30**, the aliens will react negatively (either with great fear or aggression) towards the character. The xenology skill may also be used instead of the linguistics skill when attempting to communicate with creatures.

When a character is interacting with a known alien with whom communication has already been established, the appropriate Interpersonal Skill is used (see *Universe*, 14.0). However, the lower of the character's appropriate interpersonal Skill Level and xenology Skill Level is used to modify the Base Chance. For example, if a character with a trading Skill Level of 4 and a xenology Skill Level of 2 were attempting to trade with an alien, his Skill Level would be considered 2. If he had no xenology skill, he would be considered without trading skill as well. A character who rolls a **0** or **1** on either die when attempting a xenology task receives 1 Experience Point.

Depending on the situation, other skills may aid a xenology task attempt. For example, psionic or linguistic skills may aid communication. If examining an artifact, the GM should take into account how that artifact relates to the character's skills. For example, a doctor investigating an artifact with a medical function might have more success than an astronomer, even if both have the xenology skill. Likewise, alien art forms would be better recognized by a Human artist than by an engineer.

SH'TK'LP TECHNOLOGY ***(Scientific Skill)***
9 Levels/Limit: Intelligence
Available to Humans only

The character is familiar with the concepts behind the technology of the Sh'tk'lp. He understands the basic mechanical, electronic, and aesthetic ideas behind the weapons, vehicles, spaceships, and other products of the Sh'tk'lp. A character possessing this skill need not perform the "use alien artifact" task (see xenology) to use any Sh'k'tlp race's technological item. Whenever the character wishes to use a Sh'k'tlp item, he compares his Equivalent Skill Level to his Sh'tk'lp Technology Level. If the Equivalent Skill Level is equal to or less than the Technology Skill Level, he uses the square of his Equivalent Skill Level and the appropriate characteristic to modify the Base Chance. If the Technology Skill Level is less than the Equivalent Skill Level, he uses the square of the Technology Skill Level plus his intelligence Rating to modify the Base Chance.

Example: A character wishes to fire a Sh'tk'lp *forcer*. His Laser/-Stun Pistol (the Equivalent Skill) is a **4** and his Sh'tk'lp Technology Level is **2**. Thus, he uses the square of his Technology Skill Level plus his Intelligence Rating to modify the Base Chance. If his Technology Skill Level were **5**, he would instead use the square of his Laser/Stun Pistol Level and Dexterity Rating to modify the Base Chance.

When a character uses a Sh'tk'lp item, he may gain an EP in accordance with the appropriate Equivalent Skill description. If an EP is gained, it is applied only to the skill used to modify the Base Chance — either the Equivalent Skill or the Sh'tk'lp Technology Skill Level, a character must amass a number of EPs equal to twice the level to be attained. For example, to increase from Level **2** to Level **3** would require **6** EPs.

HUMAN TECHNOLOGY ***(Scientific Skill)***
9 Levels/Limit: Intelligence
Available to Sh'tk'lp

This skill is identical in all respects to the Sh'tk'lp technology skill, except that it represents an alien character's familiarity with Human devices.

IV. The Sh'k'tlp

4. Physical Characteristics

Sh'k'tlp are a carbon-based life form, they breathe oxygen, and they are sapient. They are not warm-blooded as we understand the term (no drawback on their home planet, which has an average temperature of 37 degrees Celsius — around 100 degress Farenheit — and mild seasons), but they do have a highly complex and efficient circulatory system. They are like terrestrial marsupials in that they are oviparous (laying eggs outside the body) and have a pouch. Unlike marsupials, the eggs are not incubated in any way in a nest; rather, the eggs are laid directly into the pouch for warmth and safe-keeping during the incubation period. The Sh'k'tlp have distinct male and female sexes; both sexes contain pouches and the incubation period is shared, though females usually have a closer attachment to their eggs.

Sh'k'tlp mass between 1 and 50 kg, adults between 40 and 50 kg in their natural form. Females are generally slightly larger than males. They have four limbs and a retractable spine. Bones are of an aluminous silicate and play no part in maintaining the being's circulatory system.

Sh'k'tlp have limited shape-changing abilities. Essentially, they can rearrange their flesh in nearly any shape, but their bones can be rearranged only marginally. Consequently, any shape a Sh'k'tlp takes must have four limbs (though limbs can, of course, be hidden by fitting them into grooves along the side, and false limbs of flesh containing no bones can be created). The retractable spine allows Sh'k'tlp the option of having a tail or not; it can also be used to create a fifth limb, though that limb will not have

functional fingers or toes since the end of the tail lacks the necessary minor bones. The tail bone is incapable of supporting the weight of a Sh'k'tlp, and thus cannot be used as a monkey's; neither is it able to grasp and firmly hold an object.

In addition, Sh'k'tlp have a color-changing ability similar to that of chameleons. They are capable only of monochromatic color-schemes (i.e., they may not color themselves with patterns). **Note:** The ability to use color-schemes can be achieved by Sh'k'tlp through intensive training; it is considered an art form and a badge of status among the Sh'k'tlp. A Sh'k'tlp character may learn color-scheming.

Conservation of mass, of course, does apply to Sh'k'tlp shape-changing. Thus, a 50 kg Sh'k'tlp can take on a wide variety of forms, but all of them will mass 50 kgs.

Sh'k'tlp are completely hairless and featherless, and cannot create hair or feathers as a result of shape-changing. Thus, it would be difficult for a Sh'k'tlp to pass as Human. However, those with color-changing ability may be able to create small dark markings that mimic the appearance of hair. Close inspection of such markings would reveal the fraud.

A Sh'k'tlp can change shape in 2 to 20 minutes, depending on the shape chosen. When a Sh'k'tlp character decides to change shape, the GM should determine how long it will take him to do so; essentially, the more radical the change in shape, the longer it should take. For the sake of simplicity, the GM may, if he so wishes, roll two dice, add the numbers, and use the result as the number of minutes required.

Instead of Strength, Dexterity and Agility characteristics, Sh'k'tlp characters have a single *Body* characteristic (see Character Generation, following). Essentially, this Body characteristic can be broken down into Strength, Dexterity, and Agility characteristics; the sum of these three characteristics may not exceed the Body characteristic. **Note:** No characteristic may be less than one.

A Sh'k'tlp character must declare what shape he is at any given time (and this is how his Body Rating is allocated). Until he announces a shape change, he must use that particular Body Rating breakdown.

Sh'k'tlp flesh can be formed into hard, horny plates or protuberances at the termination of the limbs and tail. Thus, effectively, Sh'k'tlp can form claws for use in combat. When a Sh'k'tlp changes shape, its character may stipulate that it is forming claws; if so, its Dexterity may not be greater than **2**. Sh'k'tlp with claws add **2** to their Unarmed Combat Skill when engaged in combat at close quarters.

Because they are cold-blooded, Sh'k'tlp become sluggish and irritable at temperatures below 27 degrees C. (80 degrees F.) and can die if exposed to temperatures below 10 degrees C. (50 degrees F.) for extended periods of time (for instance, the sum of two die-rolls in hours at 10 degrees C. before death and proportionately shorter times for lower temperatures).

Because the sun of the Sh'k'tlp home planet is hotter and bluer than Sol, the Sh'k'tlp visible spectrum is centered on about 4500 Angstroms, which means they cannot see red but can see another color in the ultraviolet (which they call k'hr'du).

5. Sh'k'tlp Home Environment

The home planet of the Sh'k'tlp is called Sh'k'tlp, the second planet of Sh'ddd (Drum in the *Universe* game; -38, 43, 16), an F-class star. Sh'k'tlp has an average global temperature of 37 degrees C. (100 degrees F.). Although its hydrographic percentage is low by comparison with Earth (45%) and there are few large bodies of water, the higher temperature and lack of icecaps means the air of Sh'k'tlp is, by and large, extremely humid. (The exceptions are mostly in the great temperate desert zone.) As a result, most of the planet is covered by lush, dense, rapidly-growing vegetation. The high incidence of radiation on the planetary surface (relative to Earth) means more plantlife can be supported per square meter since there is more energy to tap. Consequently, a higher density of animal life can also be supported. The result is an environment similar to Western misconceptions of jungle life: tremendous, lush vegetation teeming with life, constant predation, and constant danger.

Life on Sh'k'tlp is extremely dangerous. A fantastic variety of predators has evolved since life began on the planet. There were three early life forms that competed for dominance on the land, once the dry surface had been colonized: one form was quite similar to the dinosaurian predecessors, another was a primitive mammal, and the third the forebearer of all shape-changers. A harsh change of climate just at the time these three ancestors were competing for dominance gave the edge to the shape-changers. Though mammalian and reptilian creatures still survive, the shape-changers are the predominant species on Sh'k'tlp. (In Earth terms, it would be as though the dinosaur line conquered and had never become extinct.) Since that early climatic catastrophe on Sh'k'tlp, there have been no others, allowing the shape-changers to remain dominant. Though the marsupial-like reproduction of the shape-changers is somewhat more primitive than that of mammals, the dominance of shape-changers has never been seriously challenged by competing life forms. The main predators on Sh'k'tlp are, of course, shape-changers.

The predators have a much greater shape-changing ability than the Sh'k'tlp; the more dangerous predators can literally take on any shape and coloration (though they are still limited by mass considerations). In response to this continuing evolutionary pressure, the Sh'k'tlp have evolved three defenses:

1. Shape-changing abilities to fool predators.
2. Intelligence.
3. Compulsive neatness.

Their compulsive neatness allows a Sh'k'tlp to detect the presence of a predator. Every object in his living quarters has a precise location. Sh'k'tlp have nearly photographic memories and remember precisely where they put things. If a Sh'k'tlp finds an object is not exactly in its proper place, he has good reason to believe a predator has taken the object's place and is mimicking its appearance in the room.

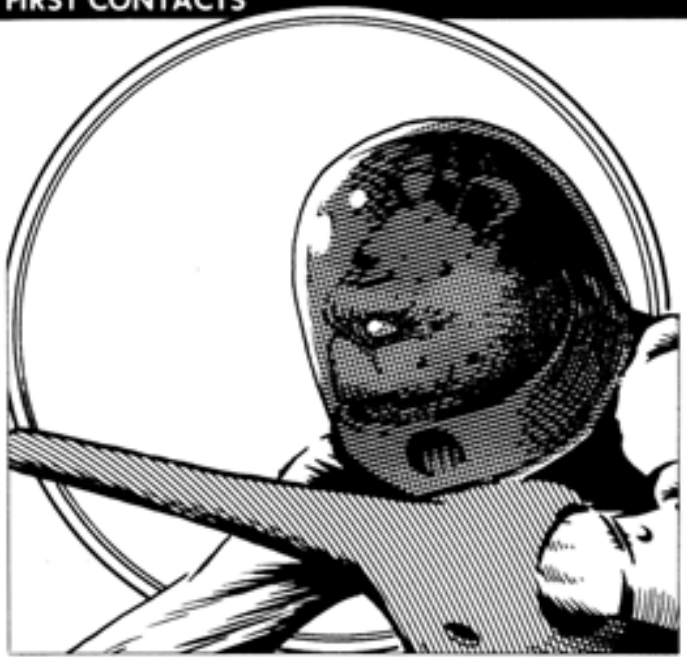
6. Sh'k'tlp Mentality

To a Human, the most striking aspect of the Sh'k'tlp mind set is compulsive neatness. A Sh'k'tlp home is extremely well-organized; color-coding and the use of specifically shaped cubby-holes is common. A common remark is that a Sh'k'tlp dwelling is like a spaceship: economy of space is at a maximum and absolutely everything, down to writing implements, has a specific place.

This compulsive neatness extends beyond the simply physical. Sh'k'tlp commonly take a systems-design approach to every problem; that is, they seek to identify the independent aspects of the problem, develop an algorithm to solve it, and design a system incorporating that algorithm. Thus, they are consistent, logical, careful, and do everything on a step-by-step basis. To Humans, the Sh'k'tlp are plodders, not innovators; managers rather than entrepreneurs; computer programmers rather than theoretical scientists. (This is not to say that innovation is entirely lacking in their culture nor that they lack entrepreneurs and theoretical scientists; the above statement is simply a description of the Sh'k'tlp mentality.) The Sh'k'tlp tend to do things by the book rather than to improvise.

The reaction of a Sh'k'tlp to lack of organization and neatness will range, depending on severity and the implications, from irritation to fear or anger. A good way to give a Sh'k'tlp a bad case of nerves is to ransack his living quarters.

Sh'k'tlp have nearly photographic memories. That is, they



have almost perfect recall, both for visual images and for spoken material. This trait is necessary since a Sh'k'tlp must be able to memorize precise locations of innumerable objects. As a result, the Sh'k'tlp never developed a system of writing as Humans understand; they instead use a short series of color and graphic symbols for use in industry. Perfect recall meant information could be passed on with remarkable exactness from generation to generation. Messages could be transported by runner. A numbering system was developed quite early. With the rise of the industrial revolution, the total amount of information available to a society began to multiply tremendously and a means of storing information outside the body became necessary; the result was the development of a numerical-phonetic alphabet, with each phoneme in a Sh'k'tlp tongue being assigned a sequential number. The same system was easily adapted to computer storage once computers were developed.

From a human perspective, Sh'k'tlp are not only compulsively neat but more than a little paranoid — another survival trait. They have to be suspicious of everything out of the ordinary, as any other attitude may result in being eaten. Sh'k'tlp tend to be suspicious of strangers — or, sometimes, even of friends. If two friends are apart even for a short time, they will be somewhat wary toward one another after meeting again until they can positively identify one another. The problem is that the shape-changing abilities of Sh'k'tlp make it difficult to make positive identification; recognition of physical form is essentially impossible, and the form-changing abilities of the Sh'k'tlp enable them to change the timbre of the voice by altering their vocal apparatus. Identification is a matter of mannerisms and knowledge. Sh'k'tlp often go out of their way to be idiosyncratic in certain ways to ease the problem of identification. In modern Sh'k'tlp society, the problem is not a major one, since practically everyone wears government-issued identification bracelets, which are difficult (though not impossible) to duplicate.

In modern Sh'k'tlp politics, this paranoia contends with the camaraderie engendered by the feeling that all sapient species are locked in a struggle against a voracious nature. The Racialists urge the construction of a large space fleet in order to protect the Sh'k'tlp race against possible attack from other sapient species, while the Loonies believe that Sh'k'tlp history shows contact with other civilizations will ultimately result in the immeasurable benefit of all sapient species.

Summary: Sh'k'tlp are compulsively neat; think linearly rather than intuitively; fear disorder and the unknown; attack what they fear; are willing to sacrifice the weak; tend to mate for life; are extremely cautious; and often are friendly towards other intelligent beings.

7. Sh'k'tlp Language

Rather than a voice box and vocal cords, Sh'k'tlp have a series of timpani-like vibratory membranes in the throat. Their language sounds to the untrained listener like a series of snare and kettledrums being played. In essence, the language contains consonants but no vowels, something possible as a result of the unique vocal arrangements of the Sh'k'tlp (a number of consonants unknown in Universal are transliterated as **d, h, l** and **m,** sounds not present in the Sh'k'tlp language). The apostrophes in Universal transliteration represent stops in words.

Since Sh'k'tlp have trouble with vowels and Humans have trouble with words without vowels, Humans usually speak Sh'k'tlp by inserting the vowel **i** (chosen arbitrarily) between consonants when necessary. (Thus, "Sh'k'tlp" is pronounced *shi-ki-tlip.*) Sh'k'tlp who deal with Humans will have no difficulty understanding this mangling of their language. Conversely, Sh'k'tlp usually speak Human language omitting vowels and replacing the consonants **d, h, l** and **m** by their non-Human equivalents. Thus, "unacquainted" is pronounced *nkwntd* by a Sh'k'tlp. The result may sound peculiar to the Human ear, but familiarity with Sh'k'tlp pronunciation eventually results in understanding between both species.

A Human may learn Sh'k'tlp tongues and vice versa, though learning an alien tongue is more difficult than learning a tongue of one's own species; a character may not learn the Sh'k'tlp tongue until he has a Linguistics Skill Level of 5 or greater (see 14.0, Gamemaster's Guide). There are three Sh'k'tlp languages still in common usage: Zh'drn, Kwrtp, amd Blddd'l. Zh'drn is the most common and can be assumed to be the Sh'k'tlp Universal. All three languages share a large body of identical roots for words, at least for verbs, though nouns and modifiers vary widely among the three languages.

Sh'k'tlp names commonly begin with the consonants **sh, zh, p** or **f.** Names of beings generally consist of three sound groupings (like syllables). Character names should follow these rules.

8. Sh'k'tlp History

Human history tends to follow one of two distinct trends, which can be termed Western and Eastern. In Western history, civilization initiates in a group of competing cultures (a city-state or nation-state phase) followed by solidification into an imperial stage. Through internal decay and bureaucratic ossification, the imperial stage begins to decline; eventually, it is swept away by barbarian incursions, the result being a dark age which gradually develops into a group of competing cultures. In Eastern history, dark ages are rare because invaders are generally fewer in number than the civilized population and are instead rapidly integrated into the civilization. The ossification of the Eastern imperial stage generally leads to a breakdown in imperial control, followed by a stage of competing cultures (a warlord phase), followed by re-establishment of an imperium.

The radically different Sh'k'tlp pyschology creates a different trend in their history. Civilization begins in a region. Small regional areas establish their own civilizations, engaging in trade with surrounding areas. Because of the lack of a warring instinct and the extremely logical nature of Sh'k'tlp thought, these regional civilizations gradually coalesce into a single over-arching civilization. Bureaucratic ossification sets in. At this stage in Human society, either barbarian incursion or revolt of local leaders would lead to a dark age or warlord age. However, the lack of a Sh'k'tlp warring instinct means that ossification con-

tinues. The result is that Sh'k'tlp imperiums tend to last until complete collapse of the economic framework through excessive bureaucratic intervention. The collapse is followed by an excessively long dark age (by Human standards).

In Human society, the greatest technological and artistic advances tend to occur during periods of competing cultures (witness Greek city-states, the Renaissance Italian city-states, and the nation-states of the 19th and 20th centuries). Since Sh'k'tlp societies do not ordinarily go through such phases, technological advance tends to be a slow, upward process in Sh'k'tlp history, rather than occurring in brief spurts as in Human history. In Sh'k'tlp as in Human society, the pace of change alters dramatically once the industrial revolution begins, since the industrial revolution inevitably breeds a class of scientists and technologists and a new understanding of the nature of knowledge and the scientific method. Once the industrial revolution is underway, the technological advances of a sapient society skyrocket.

Recorded Human history began around 3000 B.C., meaning there has been about 5500 years of recorded history. Since the development of a Sh'k'tlp written language occurred only about 1200 years before contact with Humans, it is difficult to compare the length of "recorded" histories. Indeed, there are Sh'k'tlp verbal epics dealing with the exploits of neolithic hunters which have been handed down from generation to generation; some may be hundreds of thousands of years old. However, agriculture began on Sh'k'tlp about 30,000 years ago (compared with 8000, on the continents of Earth).

The poles of Sh'k'tlp are uncomfortably cold as far as the Sh'k'tlp are concerned, and the interiors of the continents in the tropical and low temperate regions are generally quite dry. The most hospitable areas are the upper latitudes (30-60 degrees North and South) in both hemispheres, and the island chains and archipelagoes at lower latitudes. There were three cradles of civilization on Sh'k'tlp: the periphery of the Zh'drnk Sea (environs **s02** and **s03**, and **s08**); Kwrtpk and the archipelago to the south of it (environs **n02** and **n07**); and the Blddd'l archipelago (environs **n11** and **n04**).

Although now united, the Sh'k'tlp civilizations grew out of these three distinct cultures. They are the same ones that gave the Sh'k'tlp their three languages: Blddd'l, Kwrpt, and Zh'drn.

Each group nurtured its culture independently, with a different approach to communal living and government. The Blddd'l started out as a theocracy about 20,000 BC (by Human reckoning), but it collapsed and they remained in a dark age for over 8000 years until they discovered iron. This spawned a rapid growth of exploration and settlement of new lands. The great Blddd'l expansion gave rise to an autocracy which strictly regulated the peoples' lives and their ways of doing business.

The Kwrtp civilization started out in a military fashion. Their location in a river valley which, while fertile, was also filled with predators could explain this militarism. The necessity of protecting the people and the carry-over of inborn fears from their primitive ancestors made these Sh'k'tlp perfect soldiers. In this manner they found the way to survive.

On the other hand, the Zh'drn grew in a relatively predator-free environment, which allowed them to discover, experience, or create their own myths and religions. The civilization believed that Sun-gods brought to them the sword, the plow, and their monetary unit, which were displayed on their royal coat of arms. While some Sh'k'tlp anthropologists maintain the Zh'drn were visited by space travellers, the more popular and scientifically substantiated theory is that a group of renegade Blddd'l landed there and set themselves up as gods. The relatively placid lifestyle led the Zh'drn to favor the good in the Sh'k'tlp over the evil. They came to appreciate beauty and the individual freedoms rather than develop the near paranoia of their Sh'k'tlp brothers.

Left by themselves, these civilizations would have all sunk into lethargy and decay, which perhaps would have spelled destruction for the Sh'k'tlp in the face of so many predators. The driving curiosity of sentient beings decreed that their paths should cross. The first to meet were the Kwrtp and Zh'drn (about 10,000 BC). While there were the inevitable skirmishes and fights to retain the old orders, the Sh'k'tlps soon learned to mix the logic and beneficial government ideals of the Zh'drn with the economical and cultural efficiency of the Kwrtp.

Sometime about 6000 BC, the Kwtrp/Zh'drn encountered the Blddd'l. At first the Blddd'l leaders banned all trade with the new civilization, but the new technological advances each side could offer the other soon led to a rich black market trade. The Blddd'l autocracy, unable to keep out new ideas and philosophies, perished after a thousand years of erosion.

From that time on, the Blddd'l civilization grew to become the most advanced, taking more from the other societies than they returned. Gradually, the Kwrtp and Zh'drn were absorbed by the Blddd'l and the united Sh'k'tlp have flourished as a race.

9. Sh'k'tlp Culture: The Commonwealth

In many ways, Sh'k'tlp society is politically organized in the same was as the Federation. Most (but not all) Sh'k'tlp worlds are members of the Sh'k'tlp Commonwealth, the capital of which is K'mnt on the peninsula in environ **s02**. The Commonwealth is more centralized than the Federation; each member-planet has a Planetary Governor appointed by the Commonwealth Legislature. Planetary Governors have absolute power, subject only to injunction by the planetary courts and unanimous veto of gubernatorial edicts by all legislators from the planet. Governors are expected to report weekly to Sector Administrators, who report back to the Commonwealth President. The President is appointed by the Commonwealth Legislature, and commonly rules for a term of 20 years. Planetary Governors generally rule for a term of 5 years, though appointment for other terms (including life) is not unknown.

Each member-planet of the Commonwealth has one legislator per hundred million people (but a minimum of three legislators per planet). Only planets with a population of a hundred million or more are full members of the Commonwealth; others are colonies. Colonies have Colonial Governors but no legislatures, and their courts are subject to the courts of the nearest full-member planet. There are only seven full-member planets, including Sh'k'tlp itself. Sh'k'tlp has a population of roughly 3.75 billion, and thus has 38 legislators; the other 6 member-planets together have a total of 29 legislators, so Sh'k'tlp can necessarily out-vote the rest of the Commonwealth combined. (However, the legislators from a single planet can veto edicts of the local governor, which means the power Sh'k'tlp can exert over member-planets is limited.) Deep space colonies are under the supervision of the closest member-planets or colonies, and their population is counted when calculating the number of legislators.

Legislators are not elected. Anyone may apply to the Commonwealth bureaucracy to become a legislator from his home planet. When an opening occurs, candidates undergo a rigorous testing and questioning procedure at the hands of the bureaucracy; in theory, the bureaucracy then picks the most eligible candidate from among the ranks of the volunteers. Naturally, the system generally results in the choice of uncontroversial candidates of high social standing. In play, any character of influence 21 or higher should be permitted to apply to the legislature and, if an opening occurs, should have some chance of succeeding to the office left vacant.

Legislators serve for life, or until resignation due to physical

or mental disability. Once every Sh'k'tlp year, each legislator must by law pass a health exam administered by the health bureaucracy. The result is often a flurry of legislation shortly before the time of the exam as legislators attempt to get laws passed before the composition of the legislature changes.

Because of the non-elective nature of the Sh'k'tlp political system, political parties as they are known to Humans generally do not exist. There are groups of individuals in the legislature who see eye-to-eye on many issues and thus vote together on legislation, but these are the closest equivalents to parties (the most similar instances in Human history were the Whig and Tory parties in the late 19th century).

The largest political coalition has been given a name that can best be translated as the derogatory term which Terrans use for dwellers on Earth's Moon — Loonies. The Loony "party" has its roots in the period several centuries in the past when the Sh'k'tlp first began their colonization into space. The Loonies support scientific research, interstellar expansion, and generally friendly relations with other interstellar groups. They tend to support the status quo and are supported by much of the bureaucracy — a convenient alliance for the Loonies when the time comes to choose a new legislator. Most of the legislators from planets other than Sh'k'tlp belong to this group, but so do many from Sh'k'tlp as well. Except for brief periods, the Loonies have enjoyed dominance of the Commonwealth for the last two centuries.

The second largest coalition is known as the Racialists. They fear that all non-Sh'k'tlp sapient species pose a threat to the future survival of the Sh'k'tlp race. They wish to establish a sizeable fleet capable of interstellar war. Some of the more extreme Racialists promise to fight a war of genocide against Humanity and other sapient species if elected, but the majority of the party stops short at maintenance of a significant fleet. The Racialists also promise reform of the bureaucracy, more liberal methods for choice of legislators, and stricter control of business enterprises. Many citizens support the Racialists not so much in that they believe in the maintenance of a stronger fleet but more because the Racialists promise a change from Loony rule.

The third largest coalition (having about 10 legislators) is called the Radicals. They propose to turn interstellar exploration over to the private companies, grant the colonial worlds more autonomy, loosen restrictions on business and day-to-day activities, and abolish the small Sh'k'tlp fleet. Their greatest support is in the colonies and among the lower classes on Sh'k'tlp.

The Extremists currently have three legislators, and tend to vote with the Radicals. They believe in direct election of legislators, abolition or truncation of the bureaucracy, and drastic liberalization of regulations on business. There is little support for the Extremists except in certain circles in the academic and business communities

Finally, the Romantics are less of a political bloc than an institution. Approximately two hundred years ago, they were one of the major coalitions of the Commonwealth, but these days their sole remaining legislator is Zz'ln, an extremely old but mentally sharp female from Sh'k'tlp. The traditional policy of the Romantics is to slow growth to preserve the time-honored traditions of ancient Sh'k'tlp society and to preserve the environment. Zz'ln has rarely been bested in debate and will fillibuster endlessly; most of the rest of the Legislature will be happy to see her leave permanently.

10. Sh'k'tlp Law

The Law Levels of Sh'ktlp planets tend to be quite high — any member planet will have a Law Level of 5, and Law Levels of 1 are extremely unusual, even on frontier planets. On any planet of Civ Level 6 or higher, each citizen is issued an ID bracelet which is extremely difficult to counterfeit. These ID bracelets are commonly used not only as identification, but for banking and charge uses, and also allow access to central computing systems. An organized system of identification is necessary because of the shape-changing abilities of the Sh'k'tlp. The system makes it relatively easy to track down all but the most sophisticated of criminals, since counterfeiting is so difficult. A Sh'k'tlp without an ID bracelet, or one unable to use his because it has been voided by the government as a result of criminal activity, will find himself in extremely straitened circumstances, since he will be unable to purchase any goods.

On Law Level 5 planets, alien visitors are expected to register with the Visitors Bureau, where they are issued temporary ID bracelets. These ID bracelets are then used for all purchases while in Sh'k'tlp space, which purchases are charged against the value of cargo, or against money deposited at the Bureau by the visitors. This visitors' ID system, among other things, makes it possible for the authorities to trace every movement of a visitor, rendering illegal or espionage activity quite difficult.

Visitors to high-Law Level Sh'k'tlp worlds are advised to hire a local lawyer to help them wind their way through the byzantine labyrinth of Sh'k'tlp over-regulation. Business, and trade in general, is heavily regulated by the bureaucracy, and the typical free-trader may have a good deal of trouble complying with the law without expert advice. Merchants should expect to allocate about 5% of the value of their cargo to legal expenses.

Criminal law among the Sh'k'tlp is much the same as among sane Human cultures. Actions that harm other individuals (such as murder, theft, rape) are illegal and stringently punished. There are few "victimless crime" laws, since, by and large, Sh'k'tlp are perfectly willing to let individuals harm themselves.

Ships landing on or in orbit around Sh'k'tlp planets are commonly charged port and docking fees. The docking fee is a one-time payment, generally around one percent of the purchase price of the docking slip. Port fees are a monthly payment, generally on the order of 100 Trans/ month, and more for large spacefaring ships.

Sh'k'tlp may apply to become subsidized merchants. The procedure to become a subsidized merchant is complicated, usually requiring six to eight months for the necessary review to be completed. The Base Chance of successful approval should equal the character's Influence Rating (i.e., an Influence Rating of 10 should equal a 10% chance). If subsidization is approved, the Sh'k'tlp government will lend the character 50% of the cost of a ship at low interest rates, as well as 50% of the cost of the character's first cargo. Additionally, low-cost insurance will be available from the government. However, subsidized merchants are subject to commandeering by the local Governor in times of extreme emergency.

Sh'k'tlp taxes generally average 40-50% of the typical Sh'k'tlp income. Taxes are not graduated. Sh'k'tlp working abroad are not expected to pay taxes, but conversely receive no protection from their government; a Sh'k'tlp ship seized by pirates outside Sh'k'tlp space can expect no help from the Sh'k'tlp space navy.

There are no internal tariffs in Sh'k'tlp space, but traders bringing goods in from outside may be charged up to 20% of the value of their goods in tariffs, depending on the nature of the goods and the inclinations of the local Governor.

Goods purchased on Sh'k'tlp worlds may be subject to sales taxes as high as 10%, again depending on the need of the local Governor for funds.

11. Sh'k'tlp Class Structure

The hierarchical political organization of Sh'k'tlp society tends to produce a hierarchical social organization as well. Those less important in the estimation of society tend to defer to those who

are more important. The Influence rules may be used to help simulate this fact.

Those who have risen high in government are accorded the most honor. The extremely wealthy, and those successful in the arts and sciences, are also accorded respect. Valor in the defense of the Sh'k'tlp race, the development of new standard forms, and heroism in general can also elevate the status of a Sh'k'tlp.

Because of the shape-changing abilities of the Sh'k'tlp, nothing so crude as clothes or accent can be used to distinguish the class of a Sh'k'tlp. Instead class recognition is through standard forms of society.

For each job, there is a standard form (shape). This form is the best suited to performance of the job. Obviously, an automobile mechanic will take a different form from a computer programmer, as each performs different tasks, and can most efficiently perform those tasks by taking a specific shape. Over the years, a job tends to evolve a standard form — a form best suited to that job. Even outside the job, a Sh'k'tlp takes pride in maintaining the standard form of his occupation.

Maintaining one's shape is not required, and indeed many beings prefer to take a more generalized form better suited to walking or whatnot. However, there are class connotations to most of the generalized forms, and a being will generally assume a form corresponding to his general class. Assuming the form of a lower class is considered eccentric but acceptable; assuming the form of a higher class is considered the epitome of bad taste. Needless to say, there are Sh'k'tlp who counterfeit membership in a class to which they have no right, but under most circumstances conversation with such a being, or an ID check with the planetary ID computer will unmask the masquerade.

In Sh'k'tlp society, class is less a matter of birth and more a matter of occupation and accomplishment. Although a Sh'k'tlp child is assumed initially to belong to the same class as his parents, there are few barriers to upward mobility. Education beyond his parents' means is available to the intelligent Sh'k'tlp; the educational bureaucracy will provide funds to promising children. (The corollary, naturally, is that the educational bureaucracy is one of the most stifling, costly, and inefficient in the Commonwealth.) Hiring for most jobs is on the basis of merit. It is not at all unusual for members of the lowest class to rise to considerably higher status. The three most common routes to advancement are slow rise through the ranks of one of the bureaucracies or larger companies (slow but relatively certain); taking entrepreneurial risks, setting up a new company (risky but potentially very profitable); or success in the arts, sciences, or valor (risky, but again, potentially very rewarding). Few characters will, presumably, take the first route, though both of the latter are quite possible for interested adventurers.

12. Sh'k'tlp Character Generation

Sh'k'tlp characters are generated much the same way as Human characters. The GM should allow a player to generate a Sh'k'tlp character only if the Federation and the Commonwealth are in full contact in his campaign, or if his campaign takes place in the Sh'k'tlp Commonwealth (with all player characters being Sh'k'tlp). The chronology (see II) lists the percentage chance of a character being a Sh'k'tlp at a number of "historical" points; the GM should use the chance corresponding to the time period of his campaign. The following character generation procedure corresponds to that for Humans in the GM Guide. Unless stated otherwise in this sequence, the rules for Human character generation apply.

1. *Determine 4 Potential Multipliers.*

2. *Calculate the number of Study Points the character receives.* He receives the number of Study Points equal to his Social Background Multiplier, or one and a half times his Intellect Multiplier (rounded up), whichever is higher.

3. *Determine the character's natural habitat.* Use the Home Environ Table (rolling percentile dice twice) to determine the contour and the cover of the character's home environ. Use the Environ Skill Level Table to determine his Home Environ Skill Level. Use the Urban Skill Level Table (as modified by the Environ Skill Level) to determine his Urban Skill (if any). Use the Temperature Table to determine the Temperature Range in the character's home environ. All Sh'k'tlp characters begin play with the following Gravity Skill Levels:
NW: (-2), **LT:** (2), **HY:** (-1), **EX:** (-4).

4. *Determine the character's social standing.* Use the Sh'k'tlp Social Standing Table in the same manner as the Human Social Standing Table. Then determine the character's initial Skill Points in accordance with GM 5.8.

5. *Choose fields of study for the character.* A character may study the mind even if he studies military or business.

6. *Choose initial skills for the character.* The following skills are available to Sh'k'tlp characters, depending on their fields of study. Those skills marked with an asterisk (*) are available at the GM's discretion.

Theoretical Science. Chemistry, physics, biology, programming, geology, astronomy, xenology (after 2340).

Applied Science. Suit tech, electro tech, construction, vehicle tech, programming, security tech.

Business. Programming, recruiting, law, economics, trading.

Sh'k'tlpities. Linguistics, law, teaching, culture.

The Mind. Psionic boost, psionic communication, life sense, body control.

The Body. Unarmed combat, ambush, EVA, gravity (home gravity type only), jet pack, survival, body control.

Military. Ambush, longarms, handguns, grenades.

General.* Laser/stun pistol, gambling, blades, air vehicles, (direct lift sub-skill only), urban (if level is one or higher), environ (home environ only), multicolor, shape-change, Human technology (after 2360).

7. *Determine the character's 7 characteristic ratings.* Strength, Dexterity, and Agility are not generated; instead, the Body characteristic is generated as follows: use the Body Modifier Chart in the same way that the Characteristic Modifier Chart is used to determine the modifier that will be applied to the dice roll on the Characteristic Generation Table (*Universe,* 6.6). Double the result achieved on the Generation Table; this product is the character's Body Rating, which may range from 3 to 24 (if a 2 is generated, increase it to 3).

8. *Choose a profession for the character.* Professions available to Sh'k'tlp characters are listed in 13.

9. *Declare how many years the character will practice his profession.*

10. *Determine the effects of age on the character.* If the character is beyond the age of 24, use the Sh'k'tlp Effects of Age Table to find if his body and/or Endurance ratings are reduced.

11. *Calculate the number of Skill Points the character receives.*

12. *Choose skills for the character.* Skills from the appropriate Sh'k'tlp fields of study and the profession may be chosen.

13. *Determine benefits the character receives from his profession.*

14. *Determine the character's Influence Rating.* Multiply the Influence Multiplier listed with the character's profession by his Benefit Level (A=1, B=2 . . . F=6) and halve the product (rounding down). The result of this calculation is the character's Influence Rating. The initial rating may range from 1 to 21.

13. Sh'k'ltp Professions

The following professions are not available to Sh'k'tlp characters: Astroguard; civil inspector; freefaller; ranger; space pirate; spy; and spacetrooper. All other Human professions listed in *Universe* 7.9 are available. However, the GM should keep in mind the following general guidelines when applying Human professions to Sh'k'tlp characters.

The GM must alter the description of the profession to fit Sh'k'tlp culture. Specifically, all mentions of the Federation should be replaced with the Commonwealth. Military professions should be considered government service with a military-like selection and ranking system. Military ranks may be taken from the examples given in the Sh'k'tlp militia and Psiguard professions below. All mention of heavy weapons in Sh'k'tlp military professions should be ignored.

The prerequisites listed for each profession remain the same. If the profession lists Strength, Dexterity, and/or Agility as prerequisites, a Sh'k'tlp character may enter such a profession if he can fulfill all prerequisites in a single shape. **Example:** A Sh'k'tlp character would have to have a Body Rating of at least 9 to become a space technician, because the profession requires Dexterity 7. A Sh'k'tlp with Body 9 could assume a Dexterity 7 shape, allocating one point each to Strength and Agility; one with lower body could not, because any shape must always have Strength, Agility, and Dexterity of at least 1 each. **Example:** A Sh'k'tlp character would have to have a Body Rating of at least 12 to become an enforcer. Enforcers must have physical characteristics of at least 4 each; a Sh'k'tlp with Body 12 could assume a shape having Strength 4, Dexterity 4, and Agility 4.

The Skill Point Modifier remains the same. All Human skills which are not available to Sh'k'tlp characters are ignored when listed in a profession. The following professions make additional skills available to Sh'k'tlp characters:

Diplomat. Xenology (1 Level only, after 2335), Human technology (After 2340).)

Enforcer. Security.

Explorer. Xenology, culture, psychometry, Human technology (after 2340).

Interstellar Trader. Culture, xenology (after 2335), Human technology (after 2340).

Doctor. Psychometry, culture.

Lawman. Security.

Merchant. Human technology (after 2340).

Reporter. Xenology (after 2335), Human technology (after 2340).

Scientist. Culture, xenology (after 2335), Human technology (after 2340).

Scout. Psychometry, culture, xenology, Human technology (after 2340).

Space Technician. Human technology (after 2340).

Star Sailor. Human technology (after 2340).

Thinker. Psychometry, psionic flash.

Culturalist.

Contractor. Human technology (after 2335).

In addition, any profession that makes the air vehicles skill available, also makes ground vehicles available.

The GM must make extensive changes in the Benefit Level of a Human profession taken by a Sh'k'tlp character. Whenever an item of personal use (except a weapon) is mentioned as a benefit, the GM should assume that a Sh'k'tlp version of the same item is available. The item's Civ Level will always be the highest available for that type of item (as listed in Chapter 5 of *Universe*™ or the equipment charts). The following new professions show a few ways that benefits may be assigned. Weapons listed in Human professions must be replaced with Sh'k'tlp weapons. Many Human weapons have no Sh'k'tlp counterpart.

Assuming the form of a higher class is considered the epitome of bad taste.

The Human professions descriptions and benefits may be used as they are if the Sh'k'tlp character already possesses the Human technology skill when choosing a profession. This assumes that the character grew up with Human contact (after 2360). Such a character must apply at least as many Skill Points from practicing his profession to the Human technology skill as to any other single skill.

Human professions have the following Sh'k'tlp Influence Multiples (when taken by Sh'k'tlp characters): colonist (2); diplomat (7); doctor (5); enforcer (3); explorer (4); handyman (3); interstellar trader (4); lawman (4); merchant (3); reporter (4); scientist (5); scout (4); space technician (4); star sailor (4); thinker (5); zero-g miner (3); culturalist (6); contractor (5).

The following four professions are available to Sh'k'tlp player characters only.

BUREAUCRAT

A member of the omnipresent Sh'k'tlp Commonwealth state service. The nature of his duties may vary widely; he can be charged with such tasks as operating a space port, regulating one industry or another, overseeing the police or another state agency, or administering colonial development (as a Human civil inspector). Bureaucrats enjoy a great deal of prestige in Sh'k'tlp society and the possibiltity for acquisition of honors is great. The pay, however, is not too great.

Prerequisites: Study of the Sh'k'tlp (humanities). Characteristics of at least Intelligence 7, Leadership 4, and Empathy 4.

Skill Point Modifier: 10.

Skills Available: Air vehicles, ground vehicles, planetology, programming, economics, recruitment, Human technology (after 2340).

Benefits:
A. 300 Mils cash.
B. 1 Tran cash; CompuSphere I.
C. 2 Trans cash; translator.
D. 3 Trans cash; translator; CompuSphere II.
E. 5 Trans cash; translator; CompuSphere II; car with chauffeur (salary paid by state).
F. 10 Trans cash; translator; CompuSphere II; deluxe air disc with chauffeur (salary paid); 5 trans per year pension.

Influence Multiplier: 7.

MILITIA (Military)

Neither precisely a lawman nor a member of a warfaring military, the Sh'k'tlp militia is designed to sweep areas which have been invaded by predators and eliminate them. Militia members often accompany travelling state employees. The work is no less dangerous than the work of Human soldiers; the weapons used are confined to personal ones, as weapons of mass destruction destroy property as well as predators, something to be avoided in residential areas. (The purpose, after all, is to protect citizens from predators, not to destroy citizens in the process.)

Prerequisites: Study of the military and of the body; Body Characteristic of at least 10.

Skill Point Modifier: 3.

Skills Available: Weapon tech, security tech, bows, any environs, vehicle tech.

Benefits: The first term in each listing is the character's rank, denoted by a shape decoration he must form on his head..
A. Point; 250 Mils cash.
B. Line; 1 Trans cash; marker.
C. Triangle; 2 Trans cash; congealor.
D. Square; 7 Trans cash; shocker.
E. Pentagon; 20 Trans cash; force gun; 750 Mils per year pension.
F. Hexagon; 40 Trans cash; force gun; air disc; 25 Trans cash per year pension.

Influence Multiplier: 4.

PSIGUARD (Military)

In the Federation, all psions receive their training through the Psionic Institute, and learn a philosophy which discourages violent use of psionic powers. In the Sh'k'tlp Commonwealth, instruction in psionics is usually given at private institutions, the closest Human equivalent being the karate dojo. Consequently, there is no such cultural conditioning against violence among the Sh'k'tlp psions. Psiguards are those who have chosen to learn both psionic and military skills; they generally operate either as adjuncts to the militia, or as private body guards registered with the Commonwealth. A Sh'k'tlp character with psionic abilities is better off becoming a Psiguard than a thinker. Since Sh'k'tlp psions do not control interstellar travel (but do run the equivalent of the Human CommLink service), there is not nearly as much money controlled by the psionic population.

Prerequisites: Study of the military and the mind. Characteristics of at least Body 8, Mental Power 5, and Intelligence 4.

Skill Point Modifiers: 5.

Skills Available: Mind control, psionic lash, psychokinesis, psion tech, psychometry.

Benefits (first term is rank):
A. Point; 300 Mils cash.
B. Line; 750 Mils cash; marker.
C. Triangle; 2 Trans cash; marker; interstellar commlink.
D. Square; 4 Trans cash; congealor; CommLink; psionic rig.
E. Pentagon; 9 Trans cash; shocker; CommLink; field rig.
F. Hexagon; 20 Trans cash; force gun; CommLink; field rig; psionic rig; 2 Trans per year pension.

Influence Multiplier: 5.

SECURITY SPECIALIST

Because of the dangerous nature of Sh'k'tlp predators, the profession of security specialist is common among Sh'k'ltp. Security specialists are trained in techniques designed to prevent, detect, and deal with intrusions of predators. The same techniques, naturally, can be adapted to use against criminals and for use during espionage operations.

Prerequisites: Study of the military and applied science. Intelligence of at least 6; Body of at least 6.

Skill Point Modifier: 6.

Skills Available: Any environs, unarmed combat, biology, treatment, weapon tech, survival, energy tech.

Benefits:
A. 1 Tran cash.
B. 2 Trans cash; infrared goggles.
C. 4 Trans cash; infrared goggles; marker.
D. 10 Trans cash; infrared goggles; congealor.
E. 20 Trans cash; goggles; congealor; locator.
F. 40 Trans cash; neuro scanner; goggles; congealor; locator.
170)

Influence Multiplier: 5.

14. Sh'k'tlp Skills

The following Human skills are not available to Sh'k'tlp characters: artillery, battlefield, body armor, demolitions, arc gun, machine guns, paint gun, missile guidance, space tactics, navigation, military vehicles, disguise, diplomacy and streetwise. If a Sh'ktlp character attempts to use a weapon whose use is governed by one of the above skills, the GM should have the character use his Human technology skill and his ambush, longarms, or grenade skill (as appropriate). If the GM's campaign has Sh'k'tlp that grew up in contact with Humans, he may allow them to take any of the above military skills; however, the character still must use the skill in conjunction with his Human technology skill.

If use of a skill calls for a Sh'k'tlp character's Dexterity, Agility, or Strength Rating, the rating possessed by his current shape is used. If a skill uses one of these ratings as a Level Limit, the character may acquire the skill up to a Level equal to his Body Rating minus 2. However, the Skill Level used at any given time may not exceed the current rating for the specific characteristic. **Example:** A Sh'k'tlp with Body 10 could acquire unarmed combat up to Level 8, because he could assume a shape with Agility 8. However, if he were in a shape with an Agility of 5, he could only use the skill at Level 5 (maximum) even if he possessed it at a higher Level.

All other Human skills are available to Sh'k'tlp characters, including security, body control, psychometry, xenology, culture, and Human technology. The following skills have special modifications when used by a Sh'k'tlp:

Ambush. Increase all Base Chances by 10. May be used as the battlefield skill during encounter awareness checks and during Action Round initiative rolls.

Unarmed Combat. Increase Skill Level by 2 if the character is in a shape with claws.

Handguns. Used when firing a shocker or force gun.

Grenades. Used when throwing a congeal grenade.

Laser/Stun Pistol. Used when firing a force gun.

Longarms. Used when firing a marker or congealor.

Gunnery. Allows use of spaceship plasma thrust as weapon.

Pilot. Level 5 or higher in this skill reduces the chances of an enemy missile intercepting the spaceship by 1 (Level 8 by 2, and Level 9 by 3).

Law, Recruiting, and Trading. Use the character's Influence Rating (plus the square of the Skill Level) to modify the Base Chance instead of the characteristic listed for Humans. The listed characteristic still determines the highest Skill Level that may be achieved.

The following three skills are available to Sh'k'tlp player characters only:

MULTICOLOR
8 Levels/Limit: Intelligence

Normally, a Sh'k'tlp character can only assume one coloration. Sh'k'tlp are capable of changing colors like chameleons, but can normally assume only one color at a time. With the multicolor skill, a character gains the ability to assume more than one color in any pattern he chooses. The number of independent colors that can be assumed is equal to the character's Multicolor Skill Level. Sh'k'tlp are capable of disguising themselves as other Sh'k'tlp or as any other being having four limbs (with or without a tail), and

Any Sh'k'tlp is capable of changing shapes as long as the shape he assumes has four limbs and mass is conserved.

massing around 50 kg (this could include a small Human). The character's Body characteristic and the *square of his Skill Level* are added to the Base Chance for the following tasks:

T► Disguise self to resemble being that has been extensively observed: **50%.**

T► Disguise self to resemble being that has been seen briefly or in pictures only: **25%.**

The Base Chance is reduced by 25% when the character is attempting to fool any non-Sh'tk'lp being. This is because Sh'tk'lp do not see in the Human visible range and are consequently unable to color themselves red, something an attentive human observer might notice. The result of a multicolor disguise attempt is implemented as described in the Disguise skill description (see *Universe*™ 14.0). A character who rolls a **0, 1,** or **2** on either die when using the Multicolor skill receives an Experience Point.

PSIONIC LASH
7 Levels/Limit: Intelligence

Psionic lash is a skill which allows a character to make a mental attack on a Human being. Because of the structure of the Human Psionic Institute, the skill is not normally available to Humans, though a Sh'tk'lp with teaching skill might be willing to teach a psionic Human the skill. The Base Chance of success in psionic lash attack is **40%.** To this is added the character's Mental Power Rating and the square of his *Psionic Lash Skill.* The target's *Intelligence* and *Mental Power* are subtracted from the chance. Percentile dice are then rolled; if the number rolled is less than or equal to the number calculated, the attempt has been successful. If a psionic lash atempt fails, the character using the skill is subjected to Psionic Backlash.

If the psionic lash attempt succeeds, the being subject to the attack is subject to a roll on the Psionic Backlash Table (10.4). Determine the first digit of the two-digit number rolled when determining whether or not the psionic lash succeeds; square this number, and add it to the roll on the Psionic Backlash Table. **Example:** Zzl'brtz has Mental Power of 6 and Psionic Lash Skill of 3. 3 squared is 9; 40+9+6=55. His target has Intelligence 4 and Mental Power 2; 55-4-2=49. The chance of success is 49%. Zzl'brtz rolls a 36; his attempt therefore succeeds. The first digit of 36 is 3; 3 squared is 9; therefore 9 is added to the die roll on the Psionic Backlash Table. Zzl'brtz rolls again, and rolls a 46. 46+9 =55. 55 on the Psionic Backlash Table means the target of the psionic lash passes out, and his Endurance Rating is reduced to 0.

Psionic rigs and Psionic Boost may be used to increase the chance of success. A character who rolls a **0** or **1** on either die when attempting Psionic Lash receives an Experience Point.

SHAPE-CHANGE
7 Levels/Limit: Half of Body

The limit is one half of the character's Body characteristic, rounded down.

Any Sh'k'tlp is capable of changing shapes as long as the shape he assumes has four and only four limbs, and mass is conserved (see Physical Characteristics for a more complete discussion). However, it takes a Sh'k'tlp character between 2 and 20 minutes (as determined by two dice roll) to change from one shape to another. A Sh'k'tlp with the shape-change skill can change shapes much more rapidly.

On the Sh'k'tlp Character Record are printed several boxes, each labeled **Shape #,** followed by a list of three characteristics: Strength, Dexterity, and Agility. A character with the shape-change skill has one or more standard shapes into which he can change rapidly. Changing into any other shape takes the normal 2 to 20 minutes. The number of standard shapes known by a Sh'k'tlp is equal to his Shape-change Skill Level.

When a Sh'k'tlp character first takes the shape-change skill, he would fill in the **Shape #** box on the Character Record. He should divide his Body among Strength, Dexterity, and Agility; i.e., the numbers written in these three boxes should add up to his Body characteristic. Under **description** he should write a brief description of the shape, noting whether it has claws or not. (Remember that a clawed shape cannot have Dexterity 2, but adds 2 to the Unarmed Combat Skill when in close combat.) At First Level, the character will be unable to shift to his single standard shape from any other shape relatively rapidly. Each time the character goes up a Skill Level, it acquires one additional standard shape; the player should fill in the next **Shape #** box with characteristics and description.

When a Sh'k'tlp attempts to assume one of its standard shapes, it rolls to determine whether it successfully assumes the shape each Combat Round (i.e., once every 15 seconds). The Base Chance of successfully changing is **45%**; add to this the *square* of the *Shape-change Skill Level* (only). Roll percentile dice; if the roll is less than or equal to the calculated number, the character successfully changes shape (taking the full Round to do so). If the roll is higher, the character has failed, but may try again next Combat Round. A character who rolls a **0** or **1** on either die when using the shape-change skill gains one Experience Point.

INFLUENCE

Sh'k'tlp society is a good deal more hierarchical than Human society. There are many distinct classes, and members of the lower classes tend to defer to and follow the lead of members of the upper classes. (There is, of course, a certain amount of class hostility.) Upward mobility is quite possible, since the class distinctions are not rigid; one's social standing and hence one's influence is more a matter of what one has done than to whom one was born.

A Sh'k'tlp (or a Human) may try to influence another Sh'k'tlp. "Influencing" may be anything from persuading a bank manager to give one a loan, to persuading the planetary legislature to take action against an immediate threat. Thus Sh'k'tlp Influence replaces the Human diplomacy and streetwise skills.

To determine whether an influence attempt is successful, compare the Influence Ratings of the influencing character and the NPC he is attempting to influence. If the influencing character's Rating is **more than 8 higher** than the NPC's, the attempt is successful; otherwise, subtract the NPC's Influence Rating from the character's. Multiply the resulting positive or negative number by 4. Roll percentile dice and add the number calculated to the dice roll. If the sum is . . .

67 or higher: The attempt is successful; the NPC has reacted positively to the influence attempt and will probably do what the influencing character asks.

34 to 66: The attempt has no effect; the NPC is uninfluenced and will decide what to do without regard for the character.

33 or less: The attempt is unsuccessful; the NPC has reacted negatively to the attempt and may try to hinder the character.

Any character may attempt to influence a Sh'k'tlp NPC in this manner. Conversely, a Sh'k'tlp character may himself be the

subject of an influence attempt (by another character or an NPC) and must abide by the results of the attempt.

These rules should be considered as a guideline for the Gamesmaster, not a straightjacket. The Gamesmaster should feel free to apply positive or negative modifiers to the influence die roll as the situation requires. For example, a prisoner will have little chance of influencing his jailor to set him free even if the prisoner is the equivalent of the Commonwealth President. Sh'k'tlp tend to follow the rules without regard to influence; a bureaucrat will go by the book most of the time, although an extremely influential person might persuade him to do otherwise.

One problem the Gamesmaster may have is with characters who say "Well, I attempt to influence him," without bothering to tell the Gamesmaster how they are trying to do so. The Gamesmaster should insist that the character converse with the person he is trying to influence, and take the part of that person (NPC) in conversation with the player. What the player says should provide a modifier on the influence table; if he is especially obnoxious or stupid, there should certainly be a negative modifier on the table. Offered bribes will either increase the chance of successful influence (if the bribe is taken) or decrease the chance (if the NPC is honest). The Gamesmaster should use his judgement in deciding to what degree he will allow influence to affect the NPCs' actions.

The Human-Sh'k'tlp Influence Rating Table gives Influence Ratings for Human characters. These ratings are used when a Human tries to influence a Sh'k'tlp. The table is rather limited, and the Gamesmaster should feel free to give Human characters other Influence Ratings depending on how the Sh'k'tlp are likely to perceive the characters.

The Sh'k'tlp Influence Modifier Table lists a number of ways that a Sh'k'tlp character can increase his Influence Rating. The Gamesmaster should, of course, feel free to increase or decrease a character's Influence Rating if he performs a notable action not listed on the table. However, influence should not fluctuate too widely and should not change over short periods of time; changing one's Influence Rating is a matter of gaining or losing enough prestige so that other Sh'k'tlp tend to treat the character as if he were a member of a higher or lower class.

On the table, an increase "above base" means that the character's Influence Rating is increased above its original value as long as the reason for the increase continues to apply. For example, a Sh'k'tlp Influence Rating is increased by 1 point for every 100 Trans he owns. If the Sh'k'tlp were to lose money, his Influence Rating would decrease. A permanent gain or loss means that the Influence Rating is permanently changed. For example, a Sh'k'tlp character who is appointed to the Commonwealth legislature has his Influence Rating permanently increased by 1 point (as a result of the prestige of political life), and temporarily increased by 3 points (because of the prestige accorded a member of the legislature).

15. Sh'k'tlp Technology

The Sh'k'tlp desire for order and neatness has resulted in a structural simplicity in all their inventions. Any object, from a calculator to a spaceship, is a simple shape with as few protuberations and attachments as possible. The ability of predators to mimic many shapes has forced the Sh'k'tlp to develop a catalog of three-dimensional forms that have proven impossible to mimic. The association with safety that these shapes now hold for the Sh'k'tlp cause them to design even items much too large to be mimicked in the "safe" forms, even on worlds with no shape-changing predators. Furthermore, a particular type of invention will almost always be found in the same shape it was originally conceived, even if other shapes would serve as well in later uses for the invention. Thus, every Sh'k'tlp spaceship has one of two shapes: the classic teardrop and disc shape, or the sphere and rod shape, *regardless of size and use.*

The basic safe shape is a large mass placed off-center atop a single leg. If an entity were able to successfully assume this shape, it would find it very difficult to stand on its one leg. Most Sh'k'tlp furniture is a play on this form. The leg is bolted to the floor or wall, or, if the furniture is portable, the leg fits into any number of peg holes in the wall or floor. (These holes are plugged when not in constant use.)

The flat box, disc, or oval is another popular safe shape (dimensions of 10 by 10 by 1 or flatter). Sh'k'tlp research has shown that few predators can assume such an extreme shape, and those that can, require a long time to change into a mobile form. A perfect sphere is pleasing to the Sh'k'tlp. Although a sphere can be mimicked, it takes an incredible amount of endurance to hold the shape (one point supports all weight) and, unless the surface is level, the sphere will roll, disrupting concentration. To take advantage of this fact, many Sh'k'tlp surfaces are at a slight angle. Spheroid objects are held in place by magnetic points in the surface and the sphere.

The pyramid and cube are unpopular shapes for Sh'k'tlp objects (unless as a mass on the end of a leg , as in the basic safe shape). A predator can assume such a shape with its appendages as the edge corners, providing the attacker with stability and power as it leaps from its shape onto its prey.

The GM should keep these aesthetic guidelines in mind when he introduces Sh'k'tlp technology (a weapon, a calculator, a scanner, a car, or any other manufactured item) into play.

One of the major considerations in the development of Sh'k'tlp technology since the advent of space travel is gravity. The Sh'k'tlp shape-changing ability is greatly impaired by gravity lighter or heavier than 1G. Because of this factor, extensive research in artificial gravity using monopoles and artificial force generators put the Sh'k'tlp far ahead of Humans in this area. The Sh'k'tlp have used their knowledge of artificial gravity to create sophisticated personal and mass air transport systems. The Human levitator, floater, and skimmer are primitive versions of the type of vehicles that are common in Sh'k'tlp life. Thus, most Sh'k'tlp air vehicles will call for use of the Direct Lift air vehicle sub-skill. Ground and marine vehicles are rare among affluent Sh'k'tlp persons.

Along the same lines of research, the Sh'k'tlp have developed two types of force fields. The first is like its Human counterpart —it repels kinetic energy. The second type (called a null-field) repels light and heat; it is mainly used on interstellar spacecraft to protect against the hostile stellar environment the ship must skirt to travel faster than light (see Sh'k'tlp space travel). A null-field will repel laser and particle blasts, but not projectiles like bullets and missiles.

Because of the lack of high-tech warfare, the Sh'k'tlp are far behind Humans in the development of heavy weapons and have never used a laser as a weapon. The spaceships do not possess any type of weapon systems other than the thruster, although mining craft may carry a crude laser for cutting rock. The Sh'k'tlp have not developed defensive combat technology; the maximum beam or projectile protection that Sh'k'tlp armor will provide is 3.

Sh'k'tlp robot technology has developed along different lines than artificial Human intelligences. Robots are not designed as companions, but as adjuncts to stationary technology. That is, a robot may be a mobile component of a security system, or, as a wandering maintenance/caretaker system for a structure. Sh'k'tlp robots will not possess such systems as creative thought, language, or learning.

Sh'k'tlp personal equipment is comparable to Human devices found in *Universe*™ 22.0 and will usually be equivalent to Civ Level 8 in sophistication. Additional equipment can be found

among the following items listed below.

Identifier. The shape-changing ability of the Sh'k'tlp and their predators has led to the development of the universal Sh'k'tlp identification bracelet, worn by every Sh'k'tlp from birth. Made from a flexible metal mesh, the band will fit any diameter from 3 cm to 30 cm comfortably. Sensors in the bracelet interact with the owner's genetic code; if another individual wears the identifier, the band turns a bright green. A button on the identifier is encoded with a number of combinations and "keys" to allow the wearer access to any security areas he might be entitled to enter or examine (because of his occupation or influence). The button is pressed against a panel that "unlocks" a door, a computer link, a file, etc. The identifier also serves as a credit card, passport, library card, driver's license, etc.

CompuSphere. A portable computer in the form of a sphere with a 15 cm diameter. Similar in power to a Human business computer (see *Universe* 22.3). Used to keep many personal records as it may only be accessible through the owner's identifier. *Price:* 5 Trans. *Weight:* 5 kg.

CompuSphere II. A more powerful version of the regular CompuSphere, this sphere with a 20 cm diameter also contains comprehensive demographic and economic data on the three Sh'k'tlp worlds. *Price:* 10 Trans. *Weight:* 8 kg.

Air Disc. A personal air vehicle capable of carrying two Sh'k'tlp. The disc uses the advanced Sh'k'tlp anti-gravity technology to dart around Sh'k'tlp cities and countrysides. It is not capable of orbital or space flight. The deluxe model has an extra seat for the driver (chauffeur), separate from the two passenger seats. *Price:* 400 Trans (deluxe 600). *Range:* Unlimited. *Speed:* 100 km per hour. *Operable World Sizes:* 4-6. *Cargo Capacity:* 500 kg. *Performance Modifier:* +25. *Repair Time:* 5 days. *Armor:* 2/2. *Length:* 4 meters. *Weight:* 1000 kg.

Field Rig. Protective attire similar to human personal force field. When activated, the wearer is surrounded by a force field or null-field (wearer's choice). Activation or deactivation requires one Action Round; two Rounds are required to switch fields. A force field protects from projectiles, while a null-field protects from light and heat. The wearer may not move at all when either field is activated. The null-field appears as a dark globe around the wearer that cannot be seen into or out of. When the wearer of an active null-field is fired upon by any type of weapon, reduce the Hit Chance by 10. Both fields may not be activated at the same time. *Weight:* 2 kg. *Price:* 80 Trans. *Projectile Defense:* force field (6), null-field (0). *Beam Defense:* force field (0), null-field (6).

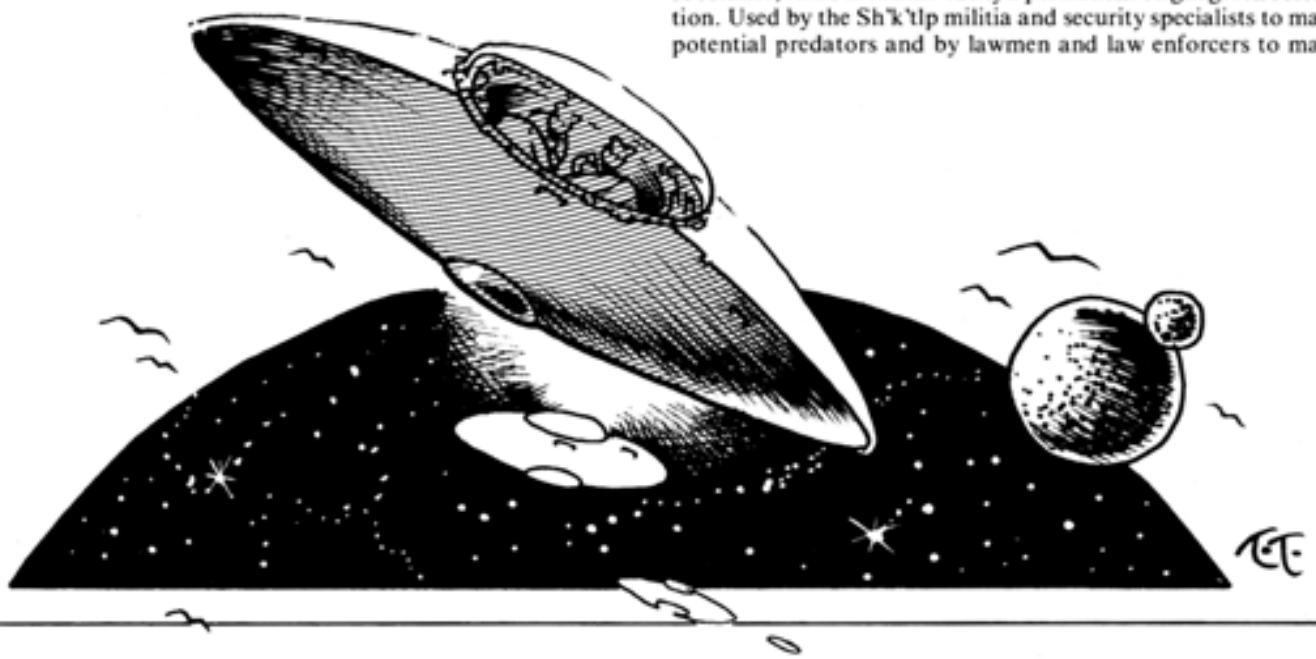
Infrared Goggles. Similar to Human night glasses. Allows vision at night and allows a Sh'k'tlp to see the color red. The goggles are worn over the eyes (whereas night glasses are held) and are kept in place by changing the shape of the head slightly (any Sh'k'tlp is capable of this change). A Human will not be able to wear the goggles, will find them uncomfortable to look through, and will not be able to see through both lenses at once. *Weight:* 5 kg. *Price:* 3 Trans.

Locator. A hand-held scanner in the shape of a disc, 20 cm in diameter. Used to scan an interior or exterior area to detect movement or to detect any changes in the area since it was last scanned. The locator has a memory capable of keeping records of 20 different areas at a time. Most commonly used to scan a room upon leaving and then again upon return; the device will report any changes in the area down to a fraction of a millimeter. The first time it scans an area it will point out any type of movement detected (such as breathing or a mechanical device). Used widely by Sh'k'tlp security specialists to check for predators. *Range:* 25 meters (5 hexes). *Weight:* 4 kg. *Price:* 15 Trans. *Skill Plus:* 2 (for security). *Time Needed for Use:* one Action Round. *Base Repair Time:* 1 hour.

16. Sh'k'tlp Weapons

Sh'k'tlp personal weapon technology is based on the desire to eliminate predators as cleanly as possible. All Sh'k'tlp personal weapons are legal but require a permit, thus involving a lot of red tape to acquire. When a character purchases a Sh'k'tlp weapon, he must wait a number of weeks equal to the roll of two dice minus his Influence Rating (rounded up). As a rule, Sh'k'tlp weapons all have the same basic shape, but difer in size and length. A Sh'k'tlp holds the weapon with one appendage formed around the bulb of the weapon and fires it by depressing the inset button with a temporary protuberance of his "hand." A Human must hold a Sh'k'tlp weapon with two hands to use it. Common Sh'k'tlp weapons include the following (summarized on the Sh'k'tlp Weapon Chart):

Marker. A harmless weapon similar to a squirt gun. It emits a non-toxic chemical solution that, upon contact with any organic substance, turns the entire entity a permanent bright green coloration. Used by the Sh'k'tlp militia and security specialists to mark potential predators and by lawmen and law enforcers to mark



Sh'k'tlp criminals. The liquid works on Humans also. The solution must strike skin (or soak through clothes) to have any effect. Once dry (30 seconds under normal conditions), the liquid loses its coloration ability. This shade of green cannot be neutralized by any known predators or by any Sh'k'tlp (even those possessing the multi-color skill). Ammunition for the marker comes in capsule form; each allowing 1 minute (4 Action Rounds) of continuous squirting. A character firing a marker in an Action Round may "paint" any number of in-range hexes with the ejected liquid. For every target in excess of the one he wishes to hit in the hex span, the hit chance is reduced by 10 (as noted in the Fire Modifier Summary, *Universe*™ 29.6) A character may not move in the same Action Round that he fires a marker.

Congealor. A weapon that shoots darts tipped with an artificial coagulant. When the solution gets into the circulatory system of any shape-changing entity, it neutralizes the proteins in the system that allow shape change, and destroys those glands that produce shape-change cells. The shape an entity is in when hit with a dart is permanently formed; the entity may never change shape again (but may still move). If the dart penetrates the skin of a protein non-shape-changer (such as a Human), the solution will work directly on blood cells and platelets, coagulating the target's entire circulatory system. Such a target will die in a number of seconds equal to the sum of his Strength and Endurance Ratings (Combat Rating plus Agility Rating if a creature). Ammunition for a congealor consists of a large ampule containing two darts suspended in solution. The congealor is designed to shoot congealing darts only; a character with weapon tech skill may be able to modify the weapon to accept other types of needles (making the weapon a Sh'k'tlp equivalent of a needle pistol).

Shocker. A projectile weapon that shoots a charged bullet. The bullet has two Hit Strengths (6 and 5); the first is applied normally. The second Strength represents a powerful electric shock that the bullet releases after impact and is only applied if the bullet actually strikes its target (is not stopped by armor). The two Hit Strengths of the bullet are applied to the target separately; roll on the Hit Table for the impact Strength and then, if penetration occurs, for the shock Strength. Hits incurred by a target as a result of the shock Strength are applied to Endurance only (Strength if Endurance is 0), and shock hits are not reduced by armor. A character wearing a force field rig is protected from the impact Strength of the bullet but not the shock Strength; his entire force field shocks him with the listed shock Strength. Ammunition for a shocker consists of a two-bullet cartridge.

Forcer. A weapon that emits a force field (not a null-field). The field is projected as a column of energy that strikes the target like a battering ram. The gun has two settings, adjusted by a switch. When at *low*, the force gun is considered a stun pistol and affects the target as in *Universe* 30.4. When at *high*, the Hit Strength of the gun is applied to the target normally. The Hit Strength of a forcer is reduced by 1 for every 5 meters (1 hex) distant the target lies. A forcer used at high strength is considered to have a stun strength of 10 at 75 meters (15 hexes); its damage Hit Strength is exhausted at that point. Ammunition for a forcer comes in the form of a charge pack. Three fires at low strength depletes the pack. A forcer will not fire at high strength unless the charge pack is fresh.

Congeal Grenade. Similar in effect to a congealor (see above). The grenade explodes upon impact, emitting a congealing gas that affects any entity that breathes it. Used like a Human gas grenade. Congealing gas is effective in the hex the grenade strikes and all adjacent hexes for four Action Rounds.

Charger. Similar to a cattle prod, consisting of a rod 60 cm in length with a 2 cm diameter sphere at one end and a 6 cm diameter sphere at the other end. The large sphere is the hilt and holds the battery pack. Any target struck by the small sphere end of the weapon receives an intense electrical charge (Hit Strength of 10). Damage incurred as a result of the strike affects Endurance only (Strength if Endurance is 0). Any type of protective attire insulates the wearer from the shock. **Exception:** A character in an active force field rig receives the shock (as in the shocker description above). The battery pack is rechargeable and when at full strength holds sufficient power for 10 strikes. *Weight:* 3 kg. *Price:* 2 Trans. *Equivalent Skill:* Blades.

17. Sh'k'tlp Spaceships

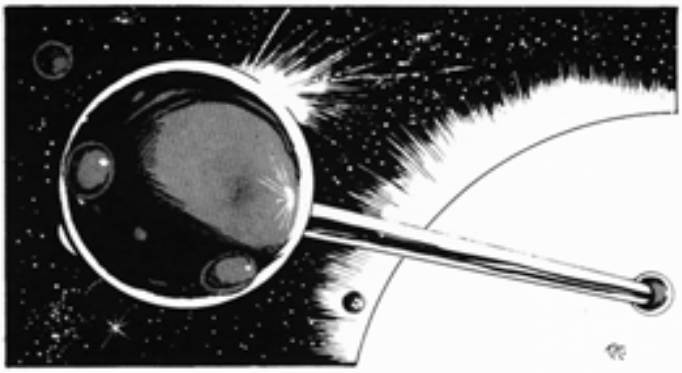
As of the time of their first contact with Humans, the Sh'k'tlp have been a star-faring race for 300 years (about 100 years longer than Humans). The Sh'k'tlp do not use psionic navigation for faster-than-light travel. The discovery of star-wells and quick-space deterred psionic development in this area. Most Sh'k'tlp employ fusion drive. Their spaceships come in variations of two basic shapes. Specific examples can be found in the Sh'k'tlp Spaceship Chart and are described in general below.

The **teardrop/disc** design is used for small craft (50 meters long or less) and ships that may enter a world's atmosphere. The large bulb can be egrated to the hull; it contains the payload, life support systems, and fusion energy generators. The disc section contains a monopole ring used to create a null-field to protect the ship when near a star, and also generates gravity for the hull. The small bulb houses the propulsion system. The two bulbs are joined together by a tapered rod of varying length that channels the fusion matter and keeps dangerous reactions away from the payload. In atmosphere-capable models, the disc is not present and a delta wing is built on top of the craft (the rod is its spine, a fin atop the propulsion bulb is its tail). Such models do not generate artificial gravity or a null-field and are rarely used for long flights; the Sh'k'tlp abhor the absence of the logic of gravity.

The **bubble/rod** design is used for all large craft. A clear globe surrounds one to six disc-shaped decks. This globe is studded with thousands of monopole points used to generate artificial gravity and create a null-field. The disc in the smaller teardrop craft cannot distribute gravity evenly when the area to be controlled gets beyond a certain size, and thus it is not used on larger craft. The sphere is held in place around the decks by the force of its own gravity and is open at the back and at one side point for access to the decks. The decks are joined together by a central shaft that extends out of the sphere as a long rod, connecting the propulsion system to the rest of the ship. A Sh'k'tlp bubble/rod ship is never streamlined.

Because of artificial gravity generators in most Sh'k'tlp spaceships, those aboard a ship are not affected by the force of its velocity changes. The Sh'k'tlp have no need for gravity webs, and their spaceships are routinely designed to accelerate and decelerate at much greater rates than Human ships. Sh'k'tlp spaceships are never built in a modular fashion. They would find the concept of pods very disturbing.

All Sh'k'tlp ships capable of faster-than-light travel have a null-field generator. When activated, the ship is surrounded by a dark globe that cannot be seen into or out of. In fact, the ship will seem to disappear from view of anyone outside, but the view of anything beyond the ship will still be blocked. Communication into or out of a ship with an active null-field is impossible, except psionically. Whenever a ship is within 30 million km (1/5 of an AU) of a star's surface, its engine is shut down and the field is activated. Because Sh'k'tlp interstellar voyages often take a number of years, coldsleep compartments are included in many spaceships. Using kryogenics, Sh'k'tlp crew are put in suspended



animation for long periods and are revived automatically.

18. Faster-Than-Light Travel

Sh'k'tlp faster-than-light travel may be achieved by any spaceship with a null-field. The ship dives toward the star in the system of origin and then whips around it, as done (on a much smaller scale) in the 1980s by the *Voyager* spaceprobes around Jupiter and Saturn. As the ship skims around the star, its own velocity plus the tremendous gravitational forces exerted on it, propel the ship beyond the speed of light. Although Humans continue to prove that this type of acceleration is a physical impossibility, the Sh'k'tlp refuse to acknowledge their claims. When a Sh'k'tlp spaceship is travelling FTL it is said to be in ts'tk, or quickspace.

The speed that can be attained by a spaceship in quickspace depends on the type of star that is skimmed.

STAR TYPE SKIMMED	SPEED ATTAINED	MULTIPLE OF LIGHT SPEED
B	1 LY per day	365
A	1 LY per 3 days	120
F	1 LY per 10 days	35
G	1 LY per Month	12
K	1 LY per 3 Months	4
M	1 LY per year	1

Once light speed, or greater, is attained, the direction and speed of the spaceship may not be altered at all except by encountering another star (the destination). Thus, accurate navigation and plotting are essential for safe FTL travel. When the destination star is reached, the ship uses the gravitational forces of the star to go into orbit around the star in an ever-increasing spiral so that the ship slows down to maneuver speed. The amount of time this deceleration takes depends on the speed the ship is going, and the spectral class of the destination star. This time can be calculated as follows: Divide the ship's speed (expressed as a multiple of the speed of light in the preceeding table) by the light speed multiple listed for the destination star. The result of this division is the number of days required for the ship to decelerate to maneuver speed. For example, if a ship entered quickspace by skimming an F star (light speed multiple 35) and its destination is a K star (multiple of 4), it would take 8 days and 18 hours (35/4=8.75) for the ship to slow down once the destination is reached. If the ship were travelling from the K star to the F star, deceleration time would take 3 hours, but the interstellar travel time would be almost nine times as long.

After a spaceship reaches its destination star and has slowed to maneuver speed, it will be orbiting the star at one of the following distances, in AUs: B (25), A (18), F (13), G (9), K (6), M (4).

Sh'k'tlp faster-than-light travel causes a strange phenomenon to occur, which it uses to enter, or come out of quickspace. When a ship crosses the "light barrier," it momentarily affects the star as if the ship possessed great mass; the star dims for a few moments as its surface gases are sucked away by the departing ship. This "mass anomaly" is retained by the ship until it reaches its destination, where the star there receives this mass, and burns brighter for a few moments.

Any Sh'k'tlp character that has pilot, physics, and astronomy skills may navigate a Sh'k'tlp ship for faster-than-light travel. Through careful course plotting, star surveying, and trajectory corrections, the navigator guides the ship to the exit star, whips the ship into quickspace, and then brings the ship to sublight speed in the gravity well of the destination star. When a character with all three skills (at Level 1 or greater) is navigating a ship, roll percentile dice. Unless the roll is 100 (0,0), the voyage is safely navigated. If the result is 100, roll percentile dice again. If the second roll is greater than the following sum, the ship is on a quickspace course that will not meet the target star, and will travel on and on and on. . . .

[20+Intelligence+(Pilot+Astronomy+Physics)]
The lowest of these three skill levels is squared before adding.

If the second dice roll is equal to or less than the sum, the voyage is safe. A Human character may safely navigate a Sh'k'tlp ship into quickspace if he fulfills the above requirements *and* has the Sh'k'tlp technology skill. If any character does not fulfill the above requirements and attempts to navigate into quickspace, only the *first* percentile dice roll is compared to the equation shown above.

Throughout the history of the Sh'k'tlp quickspace travel, a number of Sh'k'tlp ships have gone astray (about 1 out of every 400 journeys). The Sh'k'tlp maintain records of these ships, and for each one, have calculated the likely date when the ship will intercept a random star, enabling it to come out of quickspace.

19. Sh'k'tlp Space Combat

The Sh'k'tlp Spaceships Chart gives information pertinent to typical Sh'k'tlp craft. Their spaceships do not possess laser or particle weapons and do not carry missiles. The only type of weapon that may be fired from a Sh'k'tlp ship is the plasma exhaust from its fusion drive. Thus, in *Delta Vee*™ terms, conducting plasma fire from a Sh'k'tlp spaceship necessitates that the ship accelerate, decelerate, or turn when the fire is emitted. By the same token, whenever a spaceship performs one of these maneuvers, it emits fire automatically. Because of this, when a Sh'k'tlp ship is involved in space combat (using the *Delta Vee* system), its fire is conducted during the Command Phase, not during the Fire Phase.

When a Sh'k'tlp spaceship is involved in a Command Phase, the phase is broken into the following segments:

1. Flip over every unrevealed enemy unit within five hexes of the spaceship.

2. Issue any number of decelerate commands to the ship. If any enemy units are in the decelerate exhaust zone, the Sh'k'tlp ship may attack that unit with a number of thrusts up to the number of decelerate commands issued. Thrust attacks declared now are noted but not yet resolved.

3. Issue any number of turn commands to the ship. If any enemy units are in the ship's turn exhaust zone, the Sh'k'tlp ship may declare a number of thrust attacks against the unit up to the number of turn commands issued.

4. Issue any number of accelerate commands to the ship. If any enemy units are in the accelerate exhaust zone, the Sh'k'tlp ship may declare a number of thrusts up to the number of accelerate commands issued.

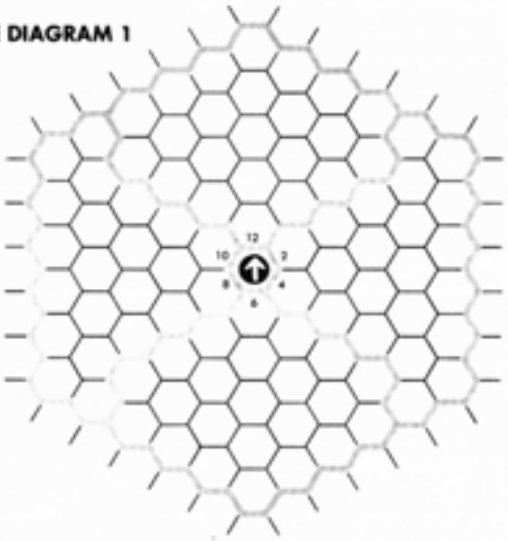
Note: At any one time during the preceding three segments, one of the following battle commands may be issued to the Sh'k'tlp ship: active search, rendezvous, activate/deactivate null-field. No maneuver commands may be issued to a ship with an active null-field. At any time during the preceding three steps, one weave command may be issued to the ship. The conduct of a weave does not result in a thrust attack.

5. Count up the total number of thrust attacks declared against each enemy unit and resolve each unit separately.

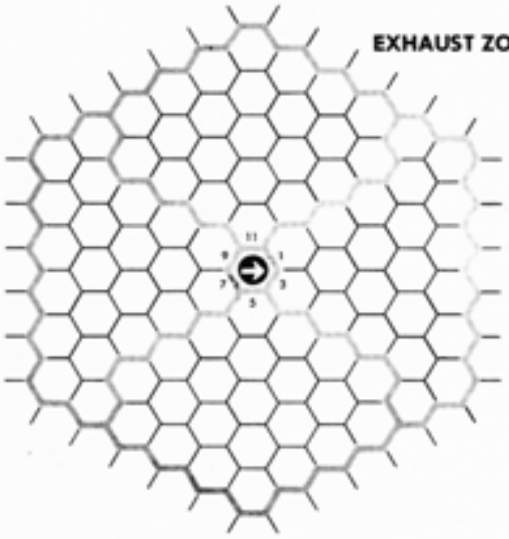
EXHAUST ZONES

The direction that plasma thrust is emitted from a Sh'k'tlp ship depends on whether the ship is accelerating, decelerating, or turning. These directions have been simplified into four exhaust zones. Refer to the diagram that corresponds to the Sh'k'tlp ship's orientation (pointing toward a hex side or hex corner).

EXHAUST ZONE DIAGRAM 1



EXHAUST ZONE DIAGRAM 2



When a ship decelerates, any enemy units in the forward exhaust zone may be attacked by the plasma thrusts emitted.

When a ship turns so that its final orientation is toward points 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5, any enemy units in the left exhaust zone may be attacked. When a ship turns so that its final orientation is toward points 10, 11, 9, 8, or 7, any enemy units in the right exhaust zone may be attacked. A ship may not receive more than five turn commands in a single Command Phase.

When a ship accelerates, any enemy units in the rear exhaust zone may be attacked. Note that if the ship turns, its rear exhaust zone will be different when it accelerates.

Each plasma thrust into a given zone may be applied to any target in that zone. Thus, if three thrusts were directed into an exhaust zone containing two enemy units, one of the units could be attacked with two thrusts and the other attacked with one. Attacks against different units are resolved separately. All thrusts against a single target are added together and resolved as a single attack, after all maneuver commands have been issued to the firing ship in the Command Phase.

A spaceship may not conduct a thrust attack against a spaceship that is beyond a thrust zone (more than five hexes away).

When a ship at zero velocity receives turn commands, no energy is expended and thus, no thrust attacks may be conducted. A ship at zero velocity may receive six turn commands in a single Command Phase (thus reversing its direction).

RESOLVING A PLASMA THRUST ATTACK

The Sh'k'tlp Spaceship Thrust Attack Table is used to resolve thrust attacks against enemy units. Determine the target value as in *Delta Vee* 8.0. Use the position and velocity of the firing ship after all commands have been issued in the phase for this calculation. Note that every Sh'k'tlp ship has a targeting program modifier of -2. Roll one die and follow the instructions on the table to find out if any plasma thrusts strike the target, and if so, how many hits are achieved. If the target is hit, use the appropriate Hit Table to find the extent of the damage.

A thrust attack is not required when plasma exhaust is directed into an exhaust zone occupied by a unit. The player controlling the Sh'k'tlp ship may declare whether or not the thrust is an attack.

DAMAGE TO SH'K'TLP SPACESHIPS

When a Sh'k'tlp ship is the target of any type of attack, the Sh'k'tlp Spaceship Hit Table is used to determine what part of the ship is hit. This table is used in a similar way to the Hit Table for Human ships (*Delta Vee* 8.7), but is divided into two parts, one for each basic type of Sh'k'tlp spaceship. Since Sh'k'tlp ships do not have armor, there are no effects listed for a part becoming vulnerable or damaged, just destroyed.

ENERGY EXPENDITURE

Sh'k'tlp spaceships expend energy blocks at a different rate than Human ships. For every two maneuver commands issued to a ship during a Command Phase, one energy block is expended. Fractions are rounded down, so that if only one maneuver command is issued in a phase, no energy is expended.

A weave command requires the expenditure of one energy block. No energy is expended to activate or deactivate a null-field. Energy for a long intrasystem voyage is expended as described in *Universe*™ 32.2. No energy is expended while in quickspace.

THE NULL-FIELD IN COMBAT

A Sh'k'tlp ship with an active null-field is shielded from laser and particle fire. The field does not stop missiles or projectiles. As long as a ship with an active null-field is outside the automatic detection radius of enemy ships (three hexes for Human ships, five hexes for Sh'k'tlp ships), it will always be undetected. The chance of an enemy missile intercepting a ship with a null-field is reduced by two on the Missile Interception Table, *Delta Vee* 9.7, to represent the absence of detectable emissions from the ship.

Credits:
Sh'k'tlp Design by Greg Costikyan
Other Design and Development by John H. Butterfield
Graphics by Timothy Truman
Editing by David J. Ritchie and Michael Moore

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[5.2] SH'K'TLP CHARACTER HERITAGE TABLES

Home Environ Table

FIRST DICE ROLL	CONTOUR	COVER (SECOND DICE ROLL) VO	CR	BN	LV	WD	FT	JU	MA
01-10	PK	01-18	19-35	36-48	49-65	66-83	84-00	-	-
11-30	MN	01-15	16-30	31-40	41-55	56-70	71-85	86-00	-
31-50	HL	01-10	11-19	20-27	28-35	36-44	45-62	63-87	88-00
51-84	FL	-	01-10	11-20	21-29	30-39	40-58	59-87	88-00
85-94	IN								
95-99	SF								
00	SB								

Procedure: Roll percentile dice to determine the *contour* of the character's home environ. Then roll the percentile dice again and locate the result in the row corresponding to the determined contour to find the *cover* of the home environ. **Exception:** If an **IN, SF** or **SB** is achieved, the second dice roll is not conducted. The contour and cover received from this table are the character's home environ and correspond to the abbreviations on the Character Record's Environ Skill Display.

Temperature Table

DIE ROLL	TEMPERATURE RANGE
1	Cold
2-5	Normal
6-10	Hot

Results correspond to the temperature ranges on the Character Record.

Environ Skill Level Table

DIE ROLL	SKILL LEVEL
1	1
2-3	2
4-6	3
7-8	4
9	5
10	6

Urban Skill Level Table

DIE ROLL = ENVIRON SKILL LEVEL	URBAN SKILL LEVEL
2	6
3-4	5
5-6	4
7-9	3
10-11	2
12	1
13-16	0

[5.1] SPECTRAL CLASS TABLE

PERCENTILE DICE RESULT	SPECTRAL TYPE
1	A[1]
2	F (0-4)*
3,4	F (5-9)*
5-8	G (0-4)*
9-13	G (5-9)*
14-19	K (0-4)*
20-26	K (5-9)*
27-37	M (0-4)*
38-53	M (5-9)*
54 or more	Dwarf[2]

Spectral Type: Choose any number in the range listed as the sub-class of the star.

An asterisk (*) by the spectral type indicates that the star has planet potential.

NOTES:

1. If a star of an *A* spectral type is rolled, roll a percentile die a second time. On a roll of *1-4*, the star is A (0-4) and has planet potential; on a roll of *5-10*, the star is A (5-9) and has planet potential. **2.** A dwarf star has no planet potential. Roll the percentile dice again to find the type of dwarf star; if the second result is also *dwarf*, consider the star an M-class dwarf.

[5.3] SH'K'TLP SOCIAL STANDING TABLE

MODIFIED DIE RESULT	SOCIAL STANDING	WEALTH: ONE DIE	INITIAL SKILL POINT MODIFIER
-1 or less	Congenital unemployed	1 Mil	+1
0	Common laborer	10 Mils	+3
1	Lower class	10 Mils	+2
2-3	Poor colonist	10 Mils	+1
4-5	Private sector employee	1 Tran	0
6-7	Public sector employee	100 Mils	+1
8-9	Military family	100 Mils	+1
10-11	Tech family	1 Tran	+1
12-14	Bureaucrat	1 Tran	0
15-16	Independent trader	10 Trans	-1
17-18	High level bureaucrat	1 Tran	+1
19	Gold star bureaucrat	10 Trans	0
20	Prince of industry	100 Trans	-2
21	Wealthy dilettante	200 Trans	-4

See 5.6 for explanation of use.

[5.4] SH'K'TLP BODY MODIFIER CHART

FIELD OF STUDY	BODY
Theoretical Science	0
Applied Science	2
Business	0
Humanities	0
The Mind	0
The Body	6
The Military	4
General	1

Multiplied by Potentials: Physique, Coordination.

[5.5] SH'K'TLP INFLUENCE MODIFIER TABLE

REASON FOR INCREASE	INCREASE
For each 100 Trans owned by the character	**+1** above base (maximum increase of 10 points)
For each form which becomes standard	**+5** permanently
If character owns ship	**+2** above base
For major service rendered the Sh'k'tlp race	**+1 to 5** (GM's discretion)
Arrested for minor crime	**-1** permanently
Arrested for major crime	**-3** permanently
Imprisoned for major crime	**-5** permanently
For major disservice to the Sh'k'tlp race	**-1 to 5** (GM's discretion)
For business failure	**-1** permanently
For appointment to the Commonwealth legislature	**+3** above base, **+1** permanently

SH'K'TLP Effects of Age Table

DIE ROLL PLUS AGE	CHARACTERISTIC POINTS LOST
37 or less	0
38, 39	1 Body
40, 41	1 Endurance
42, 43	1 Body and 1 Endurance
44, 45	2 Body
46, 47	2 Body and 1 Endurance
48 or more	2 Body and 2 Endurance

The Body characteristic may not be reduced below 3 as a result of aging. If such a reduction is called for, it is applied to the Endurance instead.

[5.6] HUMAN-SH'K'TLP INFLUENCE RATING TABLE

HUMAN IS:	INFLUENCE RATING
Planetary president or higher	20
Shipping magnate (5+ ships)	18
Minor trader (4 or less ships)	10
Diplomat	16
Other government official	12
Psi	12
Has 500+ Trans in cash	See note
Anyone else	5

Note: Multiply the number of Trans in hundreds by *1* to find influence rating (minimum rating 5).

[5.7] SH'K'TLP WEAPON CHART

RATE OF FIRE	HIT STRENGTH	WEAPON	TERRAIN MULTIPLIER% / RANGE IN HEXES% 0 / 0	2 / 1-4	4 / 5-13	6 / 14-25	8 / 26-40	WEIGHT IN KGs	PRICE IN TRANS	EQUIVALENT SKILL
Spray	None	**Marker**[1]	50	40	15	P	P	4	2	Longarms
2	2	**Congealer**[1]	35	45	30	10	-10	2	2	Longarms
2	6/5[2]	**Shocker**[1]	60	55	40	20	-5	2	2	Handguns
2	10[3,4]	**Forcer (low)**	55	45	30	P	P	4	10	Laser/Stun
1	15[4,5]	**Forcer (high)**	55	45	30	10	P			
1	4	**Congeal Grenade**[6]	P	50	-10	-60[7]	P	.5	.2	Grenades

See 16 in Section 4 for explanation of *Charger* and for futher details on the weapons listed above. This chart is organized like the Human Weapons Chart (see 19.0, Gamemasters' Guide). The skill that a Sh'k'tlp would employ to use each weapon is listed as the Equivalent Skill. The *Marker* weapon, when it sprays, squirts continuously for 4 Action Rounds into any number of hexes within range.

NOTES:

1. Weapon produces recoil with each fire (see 29.6, Gamemasters' Guide). **2.** The first strength to the left of the slash is the Impact Strength; the second to the right of the slash is the Shock Strength. **3.** The Hit Strength is used to check for stun only (see 30.4 of the Gamemasters' Guide); the Terrain Value is considered *0*. **4.** The Hit Strength is reduced by *1* for every hex in distance to where the target is located. **5.** The weapon has a stun strength of *10* at 15 hexes. **6.** Effective in target hex and all adjacent hexes for 4 Action Rounds. **7.** Strength Rating of throwing character is added to the Hit Chance.

BASE HIT CHANCE

[5.10] SH'K'TLP SPACESHIP HIT TABLE

DIE	Part of Target Ship Hit: Teardrop/Disc Ship	Sphere/Rod Ship
1	Critical Hit[1]	Critical Hit[1]
2	Bridge, Life Support	Bridge, Life Support
3	Engine, Energy	Thruster, Rod
4	Gravity, Null-Field	Energy
5	Hold	Gravity
6	Thruster, Rod	Null-field
7	Wing[2]	Engine, Deck 4
8	No Hit	Deck 1, Deck 5
9	No Hit	Deck 2, Deck 6
10	No Hit	Deck 3, Rod 3[3]

NOTES:

1. If the ship is unrevealed, treat as a No Hit. **2.** If the ship is not designed for atmospheric travel, treat as a No Hit. **3.** If the ship is not capable of FTL travel, the "Deck 3" result must be used.

PROCEDURE:

When a Sh'k'tlp ship is hit, the firing player rolls a percentile die and locates the result under the proper ship type to find which part of the ship is *destroyed*. If two parts are listed in the result and the ship possesses both parts (whether destroyed or not), roll the percentile die again. On a 1-5, the first part is destroyed; on a 6-10, the second part listed is destroyed. A Sh'k'tlp ship with an active null-field is immune to laser and particle fire.

EXPLANATION OF RESULTS:

Critical Hit: See 8.7, *Delta Vee* booklet.

Bridge or Engine: See 8.9, *Delta Vee* booklet.

Life Support: All crew aboard not wearing an expedition suit (or equivalent) are dead in a number of turns (15 minute units) equal to a one D6 die roll.

Energy: Twenty additional energy units must be expended each Command Phase until all energy is depleted.

Gravity: The ship no longer has artificial gravity. Any velocity change greater than *2* in a single Command Phase will kill all Sh'k'tlp aboard; Humans aboard may survive a velocity change of *3*.

Null-field: The ship's null-field may not be activated.

Hold: The cargo, passenger, crew and laboratory areas are destroyed.

Thruster: The ship may no longer conduct Plasma Fire (as an attack) and its Maneuver Rating is halved (round up).

Rod: The expenditure of an Energy Block is required for each and every Maneuver Command issued to the ship. If the rod is hit twice, the ship may receive no Maneuver Commands at all.

Wing: The ship may no longer land on a world with an atmosphere.

Deck: The specific function of the deck (cargo, passengers, crew quarters, laboratory, etc.) may no longer be performed.

[5.8] SH'K'TLP SPACESHIP ATTRIBUTE CHART

CLASS	VELOCITY RATING	MANEUVER RATING	ENERGY CAPACITY	ENERGY BURN RATE	STREAMLINED	NULL-FIELD	COST (*1000 TRANS)	PERFORMANCE MODIFIER	POD EQUIVALENTS
Teardrop/disc I	4	11	100	1	Yes	No	10	-10	3
Teardrop/disc II	5	13	150	3	Yes	No	15	0	5
Teardrop/disc III	5	15	240	4	No	Yes	14	+10	3
Bubble/rod (5 decks)	3	9	400	8	No	Yes	30	-5	18
Bubble/rod (3 decks)	4	12	300	6	No	Yes	20	+5	10

All Sh'k'tlp spaceships have an Armor Class of *0* and a Targeting Program of *-2*. Consider a Sh'k'tlp ship to have a Civ Level of 8, if required for resolution of a game function. Although Sh'k'tlp spaceships do not use the pod system (see 31.4, Gamemasters' Guide), the GM may customize a Sh'k'tlp ship by giving it the capabilities of a number of pods equal to the Pod Equivalents number on the chart. The following Human pods are *not* available for Sh'k'tlp ships: arsenal, augmented jump, battlecraft, battle communications, energy (already calculated into the ship), explorer, heavy weapon, hunter, light weapon, standard jump, tractor beam. The listed cost of a Sh'k'tlp ship on the above chart assumes that any modifications made to the ship by the GM include pod attributes of average cost. This cost may vary by as much as 20% if the pod attributes are either especially cheap (such as cargo space) or expensive (such as scientific equipment).

[5.9] SPACESHIP THRUST ATTACK TABLE

NUMBER OF THRUSTS	Target Value: 0	1	2,3	4,5	6,7	8-10	11-14	15-20
1	4	3	3	2	2	-	-	-
2,3	6	5	4	4	3	2	-	-
4,5	8	6	6	5	4	3	2	-
6,7	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2
8,9	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3
10,11	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4

PROCEDURE:

Cross-reference the Target Value [Range + (Relative Velocity - Target Program)] with the total number of Plasma Thrusts directed at the target to find the Hit Chance. Roll one die. If the die result is equal to or greater than the Hit Chance, all the thrusts miss the target. If the die result is less than the Hit Chance, the thrusts have hit the target; subtract the die result from the Hit Chance to determine the total number of Plasma Hits the target incurred. Plasma Fire may not be conducted against a target that is more than five hexes away from the firing Sh'k'tlp ship.

SH'K'TLP CHARACTER RECORD

Character Name _____ **Age** ____ **Sex** _____ **Player Name** _____

Social Standing _____ **Fields of Study** _____

Characteristics: Body **(BD)** _____ Endurance **(EN)** _____ Intelligence **(IN)** _____ Mental Power **(MP)** _____

Leadership **(LD)** _____ Empathy **(EM)** _____ Aggression **(AG)** _____

Profession _____ **Benefit Level** _____ **Money:** Trans _____ Mils _____

SKILLS (Level Limit/Characteristic Value)

	Level	BP's
Perception 9/None	___	_____
Military Skills	___	_____
Ambush **7/AY**	___	_____
Blades **7/DX**	___	_____
EVA **6/AY**	___	_____
Jetpack **6/AY**	___	_____
Unarmed Combat **8/AY**	___	_____
Bows **7/DX**	___	_____
Handguns **5/DX**	___	_____
Grenades **8/DX**	___	_____
Laser/Stun Pistol **5/DX**	___	_____
Longarms **6/DX**	___	_____
Gunnery **9/DX**	___	_____
Pilot **9/IN**	___	_____
Psionic Skills	Level	BP's
Body Control **9/EM**	___	_____
Life Sense **8/IN**	___	_____
Mind Control **9/IN**	___	_____
Psionic Boost **8/IN**	___	_____
Psionic Communication **8/IN**	___	_____
Psionic Lash **7/IN**	___	_____
Psion Tech **8/DX**	___	_____
Psychokinesis **9/IN**	___	_____
Psychometry **9/EM**	___	_____
Vehicle Skills	Level	BP's
Air Vehicles **9**	___	_____
• Direct Lift	___	
• Glider	___	
• Helicopter	___	
• Jet Plane	___	
• Propellar Plane	___	
• Shuttle	___	
Ground Vehicles **9**	___	_____
• All-Terrain Vehicle	___	
• Animal Drawn	___	
• Automobile	___	
• Sled	___	
• Tractor	___	
• Truck	___	
Marine Vehicles **9**	___	_____
• Motorboat	___	
• Oar Boat	___	
• Sailing Ship	___	
• Submarine	___	
• Supervessel	___	

	Level	BP's
_____	___	_____
_____	___	_____
Scientific Skills	Level	BP's
Astronomy **6/IN**	___	_____
Biology **8/IN**	___	_____
Chemistry **9/IN**	___	_____
Culture **9/IN**	___	_____
Diagnosis **9/IN**	___	_____
Geology **7/IN**	___	_____
Human Technology **9/IN**	___	_____
Physics **6/IN**	___	_____
Planetology **7/IN**	___	_____
Programming **8/IN**	___	_____
Treatment **9/IN**	___	_____
Xenology **9/IN**	___	_____
Technical Skills	Level	BP's
Compu/Robot Tech **9/IN**	___	_____
Construction **6**	___	_____
Electro Tech **8/DX**	___	_____
Energy Tech **6/DX**	___	_____
Security **8/IN**	___	_____
Spaceship Tech **9/IN**	___	_____
Suit Tech **8/DX**	___	_____
Vehicle Tech **8/DX**	___	_____
Weapon Tech **8/DX**	___	_____
Interpersonal Skills	Level	BP's
Economics **8/IN**	___	_____
Forgery/Counterfeiting **8/DX**	___	_____
Gambling **6/IN**	___	_____

	Level	BP's
Law **8/IN**	___	_____
Linguistics **8/IN**	___	_____
Multicolor **8/IN**	___	_____
Recruiting **6/EM**	___	_____
Shapechange **7/½BD**	___	_____
Teaching **6/EM**	___	_____
Trading **6/EM**	___	_____
Environmental Skills	Level	BP's
Agriculture **8**	___	_____
Asteroid Mining **6**	___	_____
Mining **6**	___	_____
Survival **8/IN**	___	_____

POSSESSIONS

_____

_____

_____

SHAPES

Shape 1 Description: _____

_____

ST _____ **DX** _____ **AG** _____

Shape 2 Description: _____

_____

ST _____ **DX** _____ **AG** _____

Shape 3 Description: _____

_____

ST _____ **DX** _____ **AG** _____

ENVIRON SKILL DISPLAY

	Volcanic (VO)	Craters (CR)	Barren (BN)	Lt Veg (LV)	Woods (WD)	Forest (FT)	Jungle (JU)	Marsh (MA)	Ice (IC)
Peaks (PK)									
Mountains (MN)									
Hills (HL)									
Flat (FL)									
Inland Water (IN)									
Water Surface (SF)									
Water Submerged (SB)									

Urban Skill Level

_____

Gravity Skill Levels

0.0-0.4G **(NW)** ☐

0.7-1.0G **(LT)** ☐

1.3-1.7G **(HY)** ☐

2.0-2.5G **(EX)** ☐

Temperature Range

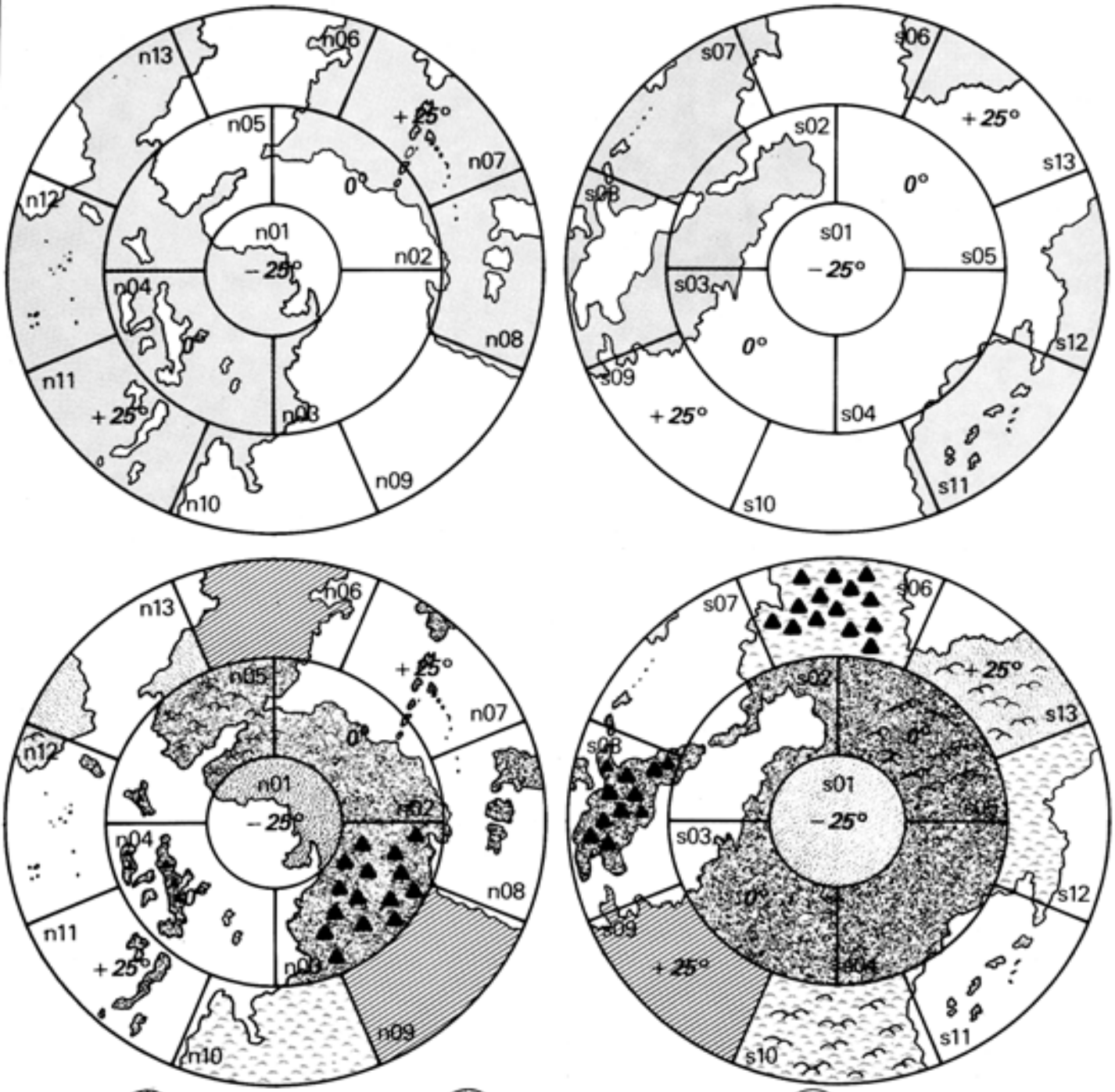
_____ -50-0° **(CD)**

_____ 25-100° **(NL)**

_____ 125-175° **(HO)**

WORLD LOG: Size 5

Gravity: 1.0 (LT) **Action Round Movement:** None



NAME Sh'k'tlp TYPE E MOONS (Inr.) 3

DISTANCE FROM STAR 1AU ATMOSPHERE NORM MEAN TEMP 100°F

HYDROGRAPH 45 DAY LENGTH 18hrs.

SETTLEMENT STATUS N/A LAW LEVEL 3 CIV LEVEL 8

SPACEPORT CLASS 5 RESOURCES

REMARKS **Sh'k'tlp Home World**

Sh'k'tlp population 3 3/4 Billion

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